Knowing and Unknowing Reality –
A Beginner's and Expert's Developmental Guide
to Post-Metaphysical Thinking

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Preface

Depending on one's tolerance, or even love, for uncertainty and the unknown, "post-metaphysical thinking" can be either a fascination or a real downer. And by "interest in uncertainty and the unknown" I don't mean that effervescent attraction to the mystical, magical, esoteric, and unbelievable – I mean the blunt confrontation with how, when it comes down to it, the certainty that one holds for much of one's beliefs and knowledge is bewilderingly undeserved. To get the most out of this text it is best to consider how it applies to one's own knowledge, in addition to reading it as an exploration of the indeterminacies of knowledge in general. But for those truly interested in where the post-metaphysical arrow points, you know that it is about attitudes of deep curiosity, listening, and humility – skills of letting go, letting be, and letting come – that we long to see more of in our world. Here already the reader can sense how being "post-metaphysical" relates to spirituality.

I have had a lifelong interest in the nature of knowledge, belief, and uncertainty. This philosophical curiosity paralleled my avocational experiences in various forms of conflict resolution and dialogue processes, alongside studies in cognitive psychology and philosophy. Amidst the confluence of perspectives found in real dialogue and deliberation one must come to terms with, as I call it in this text, "the sources of belief fallibility." How intelligent, well-informed, well-meaninged people can come to very different conclusions is a koan-like puzzle I was drawn into. I've been trying to let this puzzle solve me for over 40 years.

I find myself immersed in both scientific communities and New Age (or "Cultural Creative") communities, and judge that conversations between them are rife with straw men and confirmation biases. This text is, in one sense, an outcome of my own internal process, over decades, of allowing the voices of these diverse perspectives to listen to each other with appreciation, empathy, and respectful criticism. I believe that the future of humanity requires spirituality; but that what passes for spirituality now is insufficient. My hope is that I have worked out a few knots of tension between these worldviews to support their integration for others. To do this I have attempted to make accessible some historically recent advances in philosophical and scientific thought that inform the humility with which we must hold our beliefs.

This text began as an appendix within a larger book-length text that is in-process. The book is about "wisdom skills" from a developmental perspective, and explores the relationship between wisdom, "complexity capacity," and "spiritual clarity" – weaving in findings from cognitive and brain sciences. Among other things, it takes a *post-metaphysical* look at wisdom and spiritual development, and relates that to ego development. That book (draft) includes an appendix explaining my perspective on post-metaphysics. As this Integral Review special issue began to take shape, I decided to turn that appendix into a paper, and in the end, that became a large project in itself, in which I have combined most of what I have said on the topic of post-metaphysics, scattered among a dozen papers in the last decade. I must admit that post-metaphysics is a soapbox that I kept finding myself standing on in the middle of writing about other things, and this text is my attempt to get it all out of my system, package it up, and put it to rest (!).

Though I have written many scholarly papers, the Wisdom Skills book is my first attempt to reach a broader audience. The text you are reading on post-metaphysics is similarly written – with

the intention to be understandable by anyone who likes to follow contemporary ideas about spirituality, philosophy, and human potential. Thus it does not have the density of references expected in an academically styled paper, and it explains some ideas at a level of detail that some readers of this journal may find lumbering or obvious. My aim is to bridge the gap between scholarly and popular texts to make the key ideas behind post-metaphysics meaningful and practical outside of academic and "integrally informed" communities of theory and practice. I hope the extra space I have taken to move carefully through many interconnected ideas is worth the journey for you.

That being said, I have not held back any thoughts on the topic because they were too advanced, and the title "A Beginner's and Expert's Guide..." signifies that I am confident that advanced readers will find novel ideas and useful insights within. What began as an appendix and then an article has grown to the scope of a booklet or monograph. The chapters in this text are relatively stand-alone so that the reader may explore any part directly. For those who prefer having an overview in the Preface, I refer you immediately to the Conclusion, which is primarily a summary of the text's themes.

I should state up front that your author has not achieved a stable state of non-dual awareness or spiritual awakening according to any of the various definitions – yet in this text I dare to provide some commentary on the claims of some well-known spiritual teachers who are clearly advanced souls (or "realized" individuals). The reader may wonder how I assume the authority to write about many subjects, including non-duality, and offer opinions that differ from esteemed mystics and scholars. First, I try not to venture into any proposition for which I do not have at least an intuitive experiential taste of its validity (partial truth), though in some sections I am also treading into waters that may be over my head (it's hard to know how deep the water is when one is swimming).

Second, I try hard to acknowledge the profound experiences of these teachers, and the deep source(s) from which their wisdom comes. What I am trying to tease out is a less metaphysical interpretation, or a more reflective and explicit metaphysics, of their claims – one that is appropriate for an open-ended, open-hearted, open-minded march into the 21st century. Thanks to modern internet technology, I am blessed to live in a time in which I can listen to online lectures, dialogues, and interviews with many dozens of "awake" individuals. I notice not only where they seem to agree, but also where they seem to disagree or offer different perspectives. I am grateful for living in an age when these resources are available, allowing me to have some understanding of a territory I could never have had access to alone, nor even with a small set of sage mentors.

Those of us who listen attentively to many such teachers may even see novel pools of breadth, depth, and color that are unseen by teachers who stick to their own philosophical frameworks. It must be noted, as these teachers often do, that intellectual listening is no substitute for deep experience (or practice), yet I have found that hearing multiple perspectives that relate to my own experiences and intuitions deepens my understanding and gives me confidence in knowing where I have something to offer within the larger conversation. I have particularly enjoyed listening to Shinzen Young, Adyashanti, A.H. Almaas, Hari Alto, and Vinay Gupta, all of whom have expressed a non-dogmatic and open-ended curiosity about the nature of their own spiritual journeys. I am inspired by how much wisdom and depth they hold – even as they describe and delight in their own profound unknowing. As the reader will see in this paper, I am also indebted

to Jürgen Habermas, George Lakoff, Ken Wilber, Roy Bhaskar, and Dan Brown, whose writings and teachings have greatly informed me. While extending acknowledgements, I will mention my gratitude for colleagues/friends Terri O'Fallon, Kim Barta, Bonnitta Roy, and Zachary Stein, whose insightful creations brilliantly capture wisdom at the leading edges of humanity's pondering, and whom I draw from in everything I write.

I believe that post-metaphysical thinking, taken fully, is at odds with the ways we are taught to think, and that approaching it from many perspectives is necessary to loosen the entrenchment of old patterns. Therefore, this text is segmented into six chapters that are relatively stand-alone and approach the issue from different perspectives: a *developmental* approach to "magical, mystical, and metaphysical thinking;" a three-story "interlude" setting post-metaphysics into a *historical* context; a chapter approaching post-metaphysics from a *philosophical* perspective (through the interplay between ontology and epistemology); another philosophically oriented chapter comparing the properties of concrete reality with those of ideas; and a chapter approaching post-metaphysics from an *embodied and experiential* (phenomenological) perspective. In addition to these six chapters are the Introduction, which sets the stage, and a Conclusion that summarizes the book and folds in some connections to *ethics*. Enjoy and wonder.

Introduction and Some Foundations

The Metaphysics to Come

"Post-metaphysics" is a term coined by philosopher Jürgen Habermas to refer to a historically emerging trend toward a more humble and reflective attitude on truth and belief that acknowledges how human knowledge is deeply fallible. It signals a move away from – not only the religious and dogmatic orientations to truth predominant in pre-modern cultures – but from more subtle modes of unreflective metaphysical thinking predominant in modern cultures. This trend is observed in every domain of human discourse, from the scholarly treatises of philosophers to newspaper editorials and dinner table conversations. Post-metaphysics signals a distancing from definitive or authoritative proclamations of universal truth. In this text I use a *developmental* approach that describes levels of sophistication and depth in both the individual's reasoning and in cultural trends. Thus, the historically emerging trend in thought that Habermas termed "post-metaphysics" is also an evolutionary or developmental trend in the complexity and depth of reason achieved, or achievable, by society.

"Metaphysics" traditionally refers to claims about the essence or ultimate nature of reality, being, or existence – thus the term *post*-metaphysics points beyond such claims. Just as the term "post-rational" refers to an understanding of the limitations of rationality, and not to *non*-rationality or irrationality, post-metaphysics does not imply the rejection of metaphysics, but rather a reflective attitude that understands the limitations and best uses of metaphysical ways of thinking. Perhaps the terms meta-metaphysics or trans-metaphysics would be more apt, especially since what we could call "post-metaphysical thinking" has much overlap with "meta-rational" thinking (Stanovich, 2015; David Chapman's hyper-book at meaningness.com) and "meta-modern" sensibilities (Vermeulen & Akker, 2010; Freinacht, 2017). Later we will also use the term "4th person perspective" (and beyond) for this territory. In this text "thinking" refers broadly to all types

of cognition, including intention, motivation, feeling, etc. "Post-metaphysical *being"* would also be an appropriate term – as thought, feeling, and action are deeply entwined.

Nowhere is the tension between metaphysical thinking and post-metaphysical thinking more apparent than in discourses on *spirituality and religion*. It is not difficult to notice a general cultural developmental trend away from *concrete and literal* interpretations of spirituality and religion toward more abstract, nuanced, and scientific interpretations. If you are reading this text you are not likely to literally believe that that Moses parted the Red Sea, the God created the Cosmos in six days, that God looks like an old man with a white beard, that a Heaven full of willing virgins awaits the faithful, that the world sits on a series of elephants and turtles, or that a feathered serpent in the sky took part in fashioning mankind out of clay.

The modern scientifically-informed intellect is more than suspicious; it is completely unbelieving of literal interpretations of religious stories about the origins or destiny of the earth, of people (and souls), or of reality as a whole. We understand ancient and aboriginal myth and lore as quaint or metaphorical – perhaps deeply meaningful but not literally true. But such concrete and literal metaphysical claims notwithstanding, we still struggle to relate to the more *abstract or esoteric* claims associated with metaphysics today. In this text I draw from contemporary notions of spirituality as a context for exploring the wider domain of metaphysical and post-metaphysical thinking.

This exploration of the cultural and philosophical emergence of post-metaphysics is situated within the theme of "spirituality" because *ethics* exists at the intersection of reason and spirituality (or science and religion). That is, how we approach caring for each other, our planet, and future generations rests in large part upon the depth of our wisdom regarding the *interplay of rationality and the deeper pre-rational* (including magical, archetypes, and "shadow") realms of the self. We frame the contemporary puzzle of how to resolve these domains in terms of the tension between historically metaphysical thinking and emerging post-metaphysical thinking.

The conversation is timely in part because of the emergence of the "new atheist" movement, which carries a harsh condemnation of religion as a social force (see Harris, 2004; Dawkins, 2006; Dennett, 2006). These well know intellectuals seem to have little empathy or tolerance for the segment of the population faithful to an organized religion; and have equal distain for New Age spiritual beliefs. Their position, harsh and analytical, has moved a few minds, but is not likely to move many hearts. All in a time when religious fundamentalism is bringing chaos and cultural regression to many corners of the world. This text follows Wilber (2006, 2017) and others in using a developmental lens to clarify certain aspects of these issues. Developmental theory can illustrate (1) how aspects of cognition that give rise to religious and spiritual needs function at all times and for all people within a deep layer of the psyche; and (2) why it is unreasonable and potentially harmful to propose an increase in rationality alone as a "cure" for religious and spiritual thinking. Though we rely on Wilber and others who have tendered the developmental view, we think that even Wilber's work carries too many metaphysical implications, and more can be done to bridge the cultural distance between rationality and spirituality.

Consider the statements shown in Exhibit A from five contemporary spiritual teachers. These teachers' books will all be found on the same shelf in bookstores, yet their teachings, styles, and

lineages are quite diverse. Still, from the quotes given, it appears that they are all reading from the same metaphysical playbook. They regularly use the descriptors *absolute, ultimate, infinite, groundless, supreme, essential (essence), pure, fundamental, irreducible, limitless, endless, eternal, immeasurable, unmanifest, empty (emptiness), timeless, ever-present, spaceless, unbounded, formless, perfect (perfection), omnipresent, universal, primeval, primordial* – and the like – words that, as often as not, are capitalized. The familiar spiritual objects of such radical, absolutist, or hyperbolic language include: Consciousness, Awareness, Presence, God, Soul, Spirit, the Universe or Cosmos, Nature, Reality, Truth, Goodness, the Non-Dual, and the Source or Ground of Being. (Note that I am not claiming that all spiritual teachers rely on this type of metaphysical language, only that it strongly informs the contemporary spiritual landscape.)

Exhibit A: **Metaphysical statements by contemporary spiritual teachers**

- *Ken Wilber* [1]: discusses "the path of Waking Up – which deals with ultimate Reality, with the Ground of all Being, with the divine Self and infinite Spirit...found in the great Traditions around the world " (in contrast to the also-important "path of Growing Up – which deals with the finite self, the ordinary, conventional, typical small self and its changes"). Waking up is concerned with connecting with "an ultimate unity, oneness, infinite harmony and interconnectedness with the entire universe – the discovery of our real Self, Big Mind, the groundless Ground of all Being, the Supreme Identity, the Great Liberation in infinite Spirit.
- *Reginald Ray* [2a,b]: In describing his interpretation of awakening in the Tibetan tantric essence traditions, says "Pure Awareness...is our most fundamental nature, a part of ourselves that is neither born nor dies," and continues his explanation of awakening using the terms "limitless openness" and "touching infinity." On another page he discusses "the space of the heart...so vast and so endless and so open...[it] has this fundamental, eternal, infinite openness...known as ultimate bodhicitta."
- *Andrew Cohen* [3]: "This is when we discover the limitless interior dimension of our own Being, when consciousness begins to open to itself to an immeasurable degree and when we discover the unmanifest dimension of reality...This absolute nothingness or voidness or emptiness is traditionally called the Ground of Being. When we discover the literally infinite, timeless, formless nature of this dimension, we recognize that 'This is what it was like before the universe was created'."
- *A. H. Almaas* [4]: Strictly speaking, the absolute is the ultimate nature of Reality, and it is beyond dimensions; for dimensions are the experience of manifestation. Yet, we do experience the absolute as a dimension, boundless and infinite, an infinity that contains and holds all manifestation, including the other boundless dimensions. We can say that the absolute is the unmanifest, the ultimate truth and mystery of Being, beyond all dimensions and qualities. But when it begins to manifest appearance, this manifestation appears as if in an expanse, an infinite and boundless expanse, that looks like black space.
- *Adyashanti* [5a,b]: "All things – all beings and all activities, no matter how ordinary – are equal expressions of the Infinite...Therefore, all attempts to either find or hold onto the Infinite are based in illusion. And illusion itself is none other than the Infinite." "Simply put, ultimate truth comes at a cost, and the cost is everything in you and about you that is unreal. The end result is freedom, happiness, peace, and no longer viewing life through the veils of illusion."

(See References for Exhibit A sources).

The statements described above are neither poetry nor metaphor, nor are they sage advice about moral or spiritual living – they are *truth claims* about reality. These teachers follow the lead of

spiritualists and mystics throughout history who have set a precedent for definitive-sounding metaphysical assertions. These are not only metaphysical claims, but often they are *mystical* claims. Whereas many metaphysical claims are justified through *logical* argumentation, mystical claims are also grounded in the *experience*, or the experience-based *intuition,* of the speaker.

Along the further reaches of the spiritual or psychological path to awakening, or comparably radical stages of consciousness, one encounters certain types of well-documented experiences. These include profound states of emptiness, bliss, expansiveness, one-pointedness, unity, and/or compassion. What all seem to agree upon is that mystical experiences are ineffable – that words can only inspire or obliquely point to the states and realizations attained. And yet words are used, and strong claims such as those illustrated above are made. In fact, *all* experiences are ineffable in a sense. For example, the color blue for a blind person, and the taste of chocolate for one who has tasted nothing similar, are ineffable. Words *point* to shared experiences and comparable experiences among interlocutors, but do not directly convey those experiences. Mystical states are no more or less ineffable than other experiences, but they are much more rare (and esoteric), and thus we have yet to form adequate language for describing them.

We should not doubt that many spiritual teachers and mystics are speaking from direct authentic experiences that are sublime beyond the understanding of the vast majority of individuals. I do not doubt that the adepts quoted above have participated in states of communion with reality, have attained a radical type of freedom from conditioning, and have received realizations about the nature of the self, that lead to profound wisdom and a deeply inspiring presence. I am grateful that these and other spiritual teachers have profoundly influenced me and illuminated my own understandings. These teachers are mystics fully and successfully embedded in the modern (and post-modern) techno-scientific world – and every age needs its mystics, along with its artists and philosophers, to tap the dreamy resources of the collective unconscious for fresh insights to address dire needs of the time.

But the definitive metaphysical claims quoted above grate on contemporary sensibilities. They harken back, in developmental terms, to the child-like mind or to pre-modern cultures, when truths were bequeathed by authorities – parents, teachers, priests, shamans, kings, or sacred texts. They have some of the flavor of esoteric mysteries offered by spiritual authorities from 17th century occultism, yet are offered in the context of sophisticated contemporary philosophical and scientific worldviews. The very fact that spiritual teachers and mystics disagree on many details is enough to support a suspicion that even the "enlightened" do not have direct unmediated access to universal truths about reality. And yet, they offer us great wisdom, and it seems that metaphysical ideas such as soul, spirit, god, and non-dual source *point toward* a territory of deep "truths" about the human condition. So these narratives should not, and cannot, be ignored.

Spirituality and religion are concerned with "questions of ultimate concern," such as: the origins, ends, and purposes of human beings and the cosmos; the fundamental or essential nature of reality; moral questions about right and wrong, good and evil; and metaphysical (non-physical and non-perceivable) beings, realms, and influences (Fowler, 1991; Wilber, 2006; Rowson, 2014). When speaking confidently or persuasively on questions of ultimate concern it is difficult to avoid claims about universals, totalities, essences, and foundations, i.e. metaphysics – but it is done at a price. The problem is not so much for the mystic making these proclamations, but for the rest of

us. Though many of them entreat us not to merely believe, but to experience and/or practice, we inevitably take on beliefs, language, and forms of argumentation from these sages. Mystical claims invite forms of ideology and "magical thinking" even if those offering the claims do not succumb to them. And, as we describe later, magical thinking can, at worst, promote fixation on developmentally primitive modes of reason that are dangerously pre-ethical.

We give ourselves permission to participate in such metaphysical thinking (when or if we do) because our esteemed teachers do so, and because our peers do so – it can be the unquestioned memetic water that the "spiritual but not religious" club swims in – the cultural air we breathe. But contemporary spiritual teachers acquired this way of speaking from *their* teachers, who were immersed in pre-modern belief systems. Though these teachers are trying to describe authentic insights sparked from deep encounters within mystical territory, the language and modes of rhetoric that they use are often hold-overs from a pre-scientific, pre-rational era.

In contemporary contexts there is an understanding that deep wisdom must have a "*post-rational*" component, and some use that fact to champion mystical claims. But, for the most part, we live in a time when there is confusion about what is post-rational and what is pre-rational. To be post-rational (also called meta-rationality or vision-logic) is to understand the limits of reason (including logic, abstraction, and generalization) and the important roles that emotion, intuition, embodiment, and cultural biases play in reasoning. But claiming to be post-rational is not an excuse for old-style absolutist metaphysical thinking.

The claims shown in Exhibit A relate to discourses about ultimate truths, and those espousing them differentiate "Ultimate" Truth (or Reality) from "relative" truths. Later we will discuss whether such a classification is useful, but here we can also note that much of what is discussed within spiritual and religious discourse is metaphysical without being about "ultimate" reality. Contemporary narratives about soul, spirit(s), disembodied consciousness, reincarnation, prayer, angelic beings, Akashic records, heavenly realms, distance healing, psychic powers, Gaia, pranic energy, divination, etc. refer to phenomena that are said to originate from a non-physical, spiritual, or subtle-energetic reality. Though some of these phenomena are being studied scientifically, such beliefs are often promulgated without concern for scientific proof. This does not mean that they are invalid ideas, but that they are argued for using "action logics" (or implicit thought and discourse rules) that may be *inadequate* to the modern task of probing for truths, as we will discuss. Our exploration of (post-) metaphysical thinking includes both the absolute and the simply non-ordinary types of "realities."

How do we hold what seems valuable and true about metaphysical statements, coming from admired teachers, sages, and colleagues, in a way that yet honors the level of reflectivity and critical thinking that is required for ideas to seem legitimate, intelligent, careful, and respectful in contemporary dialogue? How can our discourse include such ideas in a way that honors their importance, usefulness, and deep meaning, while yet acknowledging fallibility and remaining open to revision and critique? In trying to share such ideas, how do we avoid the extremes of speaking with unjustified confidence and arrogance; or feeling tongue-tied and inarticulate regarding why we believe; or sounding like naive devotes of the One Revealed Truth?

What seems called for is a critique of intellectual and spiritual confidence itself. Though persuasive rhetoric and firm "ontological commitments" play important roles in social life, the "post-metaphysical turn" emphasizes the unsettling uncertainties and limitations – the fallibilities and indeterminacies – within human reasoning and knowledge-building. It embodies an informed and active type of *humility* built, not from self-deprecation or nihilism, but from a strengthened tolerance for uncertainty, ambiguity, unpredictability, and paradox. Simply *acknowledging* fallibility or uncertainty is only a starting point – we will explore the many *sources* of indeterminacy in human reason.

Our exploration draws from developmental theories and cognitive sciences, and focuses on the lower/earlier cognitive mechanisms, including magical thinking, concept formation, and "epistemic drives" that entangle the emotional mind with the rational mind. Understanding these most basic aspects of the mind helps to reveal some sources of fallibility in normal reasoning, but just as importantly, it illuminates important modes of thinking that we often suppress or discount to our detriment.

We explore post-metaphysical thinking in the context of religion and spirituality, but what we find is applicable to all domains of reason and life. In spiritual and mystical beliefs, we find some of the clearest examples of metaphysical thinking, but in an arguably "post-truth" world we desperately need more sophisticated wisdom about how communities locate sturdy truths and valid beliefs of all sorts. The metaphysical assumptions we make about reality *matter*, and at this historical juncture we are called to craft our metaphysics more deliberately, including envisioning a spirituality that meets and anticipates concrete human needs rather than concealing unmet needs and hiding the ways we are ruining the world for future generations.

A Developmental Perspective

Jürgen Habermas coined the terms post-metaphysics and "post-metaphysical thinking" to designate an emerging trend in philosophical thought, and eventually in ordinary cultural thought (1992). The term refers to an approach to knowing that accepts the fallibilities of reason exposed by "post-modern" thinkers of the mid-20th century (including Derrida and Foucault), while not succumbing to the nihilism and relativism that some post-modern theories promulgate. As we discuss later, Habermas was in part trying to clarify and resolve a tension between theories of reality focused on objective *exteriors*, as in science, and theories of reality focused on subjective *interiors* that study thinking, feeling, and knowing. In this text we frame post-metaphysics in terms of *adult developmental theory*. Developmental theory is a cognitive science that, through a constellation of models and empirical findings, has mapped out levels of complexity and depth in how humans make meaning in and of their lives – in both *exterior* world-understanding and *interior* self-understanding. The development of meaning making maturity has also been called "ego development" and "worldview sophistication" – terms pointing in different senses to complexity, nuance, and depth in human wisdom.

The developmental approach is vital in our inquiry of human meaning-making because the important questions, motivations, and dilemmas of life are understood differently as one develops. For example, one's approach to each of these questions tends to evolve developmentally:

- What does it mean to be happy?
- What is the good life (or the moral life)?
- What is free will and how do we hold each other responsible?
- Who am I?
- How do I know what is true (or real)?

Developmental levels. The development of meaning making can be described in terms of a sequence of levels or stages of cognitive/psychological maturity. (There is disagreement regarding whether the progression involves distinct levels vs. a continuous movement – but the levels framework suffices here). Each stage represents increased complexity and abstraction in cognitive skills applied to both objective *exterior* realities and subjective *interior* realities. Increased complexity in understanding exterior things and systems "out there" is a type of development, but to fit within "meaning making development" (or "ego development ") the increased complexity of understanding must include an awareness of aspects of the self (and the self's relationships with others and the world). The development of self-understanding is sometimes described in terms of "subject to object" transitions in which operating-but-invisible aspects of the self become known to the self (Kegan, 1994).

We can name developmental levels, also called "action logics," using a pair of words, the first suggesting how exteriors are understood and the second suggesting how interiors are understood:

- 1stPP: magical/impulsive,
- 2ndPP: mythical/conventional,
- 3rdPP: rational/autonomous, and
- 4thPP: meta-rational/pluralistic.

The first term refers to the level of cognitive complexity that can be brought to bear in making meaning of the world. The second term refers to how that cognitive capacity manifests when it is applied to the subjective and intersubjective domains of I, me, you, us, and them in the psycho-social world.

Developmental theories have a variety of schemes for naming and describing such levels (e.g. see Fischer, 1980; Commons & Pekker, 2008; Wilber, 2000), but these will do for our purposes. The "1stPP, 2ndPP..." terminology refers to first, second...etc. *person-perspectives* or action logics, the naming convention used by O'Fallon's STAGES model (O'Fallon, 2011, 2013; Murray, 2017), and suggested in Cook-Greuter's Ego Development Model (Cook-Greuter, 1999, 2011; Torbert & Livne-Tarandach, 2009), and which is compatible with Kegan's "construct developmental" model (Kegan, 1994). Our terse level names hide the fact that each category has a complex description – for example 4thPP "pluralistic" is also holistic and highly strategic in its full manifestation.[2] (Note

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[2] Various developmental theories slice the sequence or spectrum of development differently, for example, though Kegan's model has about the same number of levels as we show above, Cook-Greuter's and O'Fallon's models have about twice as many levels (also called "stages"). In Cook-Greuter's model the Expert and Achiever levels correspond to the early and late *halves* of the "3rdPP", and her Pluralist and Strategist levels correspond to the early and late halves of 4thPP. O'Fallon uses the names "3.0, 3.5, 4.0, 4.5" to refer to the same segment of the developmental sequence.

that in this text we use the term "action logic" to point to the person-perspective levels; but it is more common to use action logic to refer to Cook-Greuter's levels, which divide each person perspective level in half).

The 1stPP action logic is impulsive and narcissistic (which is completely natural for the infant and toddler). Self and world are in an as-yet unfinished process of differentiation. From an interior perspective, the self's needs and drives are acted upon instinctively, and the social consideration of the other has not developed yet. In terms of understanding the exterior world of things, there is little or poor differentiation regarding which impressions and perceptions originate inside the mind vs. outside in the world; and there is also poor differentiation between what is animate and what is inanimate. The 1stPP level of consciousness is a "magical" world of emotionally potent objects and experiences.

2ndPP marks the movement into the self-awareness and self-control required to succeed in social settings – to fit into the conventional roles and expectations of one's family and culture. Thinking is still rather concrete. The world is managed largely by adopted rules, norms, and principles, often in rule-systems that can be rather complex (as in sports games, furniture installation instructions, rules of decorum, or bureaucracies). 2ndPP consciousness defines the status quo for "traditional" cultures.

3rdPP marks a move into more abstract, logical, and "formal" reasoning skills. These are used to interpret exterior phenomena "objectively," while the growth in interior complexity includes an autonomous sense of self, more free from conventions and able to think and create in ways beyond what others expect or have demonstrated. Its gifts include pragmatic rationality and creativity. However, some experience its objectivity, autonomy, and abstraction as dry, impersonal, or removed from the tender urgencies and peculiarities of specific individuals and situations.

4thPP marks a move into more sophisticated ways of understanding exteriors, including capacities to see complex systems and reciprocal causation, and an ability to perceive complex "objects" such as eco-systems and social systems. 4thPP interior understanding includes the ability to experience the self as a collection of sometimes conflicted parts, and understanding how beliefs are formed as much by cultural and contextual factors as by one's rational reasoning skills and conscious intentions. At 4thPP consciousness one can observe the spectrum of action logics at work within the self and society.

Various theories define levels beyond 4thPP, but in this text we will mostly mention "4thPP and beyond" to indicate that territory. Less is known about levels beyond 4thPP, but, for example, O'Fallon's STAGES model describes 5th and 6th person perspectives based on the analysis of ego development assessments of late-stage individuals (O'Fallon, 2013; and see Churchill, 2018).

Developmental discourse modes. Each developmental level is associated with a "mode of discourse" for *explaining and justifying* its beliefs. This is important for our discussion of post-metaphysical thinking. At 1stPP the need to explain or justify does not exist – the narcissistic perspective either assumes that others see and believe what *it* sees and believes, or judges all conflicting beliefs as simply wrong (if it notices other perspectives at all).

At 2ndPP beliefs tend to be justified with reference to authoritative or sacred people, laws, or texts; or to the conventions of what everyone else does or believes. Things are expected to "make sense" but the sense-making complexity is at the level of narratives, linear logics, and concrete past-bound facts.

At 3rdPP beliefs can be justified on the bases of universals and abstractions. For example: the scientific method "objectively" validates truths that are replicable by *anyone* with the right tools; democratic decision making tries to capture the predominating will of *everyone*; and business and technology try for the best *possible* (realistic) solutions.

4thPP modes of discourse include a deeper openness and curiosity about multiple perspectives, a deeper appreciation of the fallibilities of one's own beliefs, and an unsettling problematization or critique of certainty for *any* belief for method. In justifying one's belief's one can reflect on the justification method itself, and its limitations. One appreciates the roles of intuition, insight, and unknowing, especially in domains where analytical thought runs out of steam.

Development in sum. In many domains of inquiry important questions lead to a bewildering plethora of possible answers. Developmental models are extremely useful because they can organize these answers prismatically into an elegant and insightful sequence in which the answer depends on developmental aspects of the context. As many readers will be familiar with the basics of developmental theories, I describe these basics in an Appendix. Its themes include:

- though there are multiple intelligences, the focus in this text is on meaning-making or "ego development;"
- development in individuals vs. groups or cultures;
- caveats and dangers in using and misusing developmental theories;
- 'include and transcend' growth dynamics;
- people embody a range of levels, not just one;
- learning can become automated with practice, moving into the unconscious;
- vertical growth vs. horizontal (and healthy) growth;
- shadow: suppression and repression; re-integration through meditation and psychotherapy;
- one can categorize psychological pathologies/tensions (shadow elements) using developmental levels.

Additional descriptions of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th person perspectives are provided at in the Appendix. We also explore the action logics in more depth in the next chapter under the themes of magical, mythical, rational, and post-metaphysical thinking. In a later section titled "From 4th into 5th person perspective" we describe 5thPP.

In terms of post-metaphysical thinking, the developmental model is crucial because it explains pre-rational magical and mythical thinking as capacities that, though limited in many ways (1) provide necessary foundations for reasoning at higher levels of thought, and (2) are always functioning unconsciously and influence all action and thought regardless of whether one might be ignorant or disowning of them.

In sum, each developmental mode of cognition builds directly upon prior modes. Each level can provide a robust and healthy foundation for the next, but it can also harbor weaknesses, gaps, confusions, and pathologies. We are usually not aware of the functioning and influence of lower levels of cognition, which can be hidden from us gently through automation, or more forcefully through suppression or repression.

The Meaning-making Drive and Unknowing

The pleasure, meaning-making, and reality principles. Post-metaphysics includes a nuanced approach to truth itself – inquiring into the limits of knowledge and how one finds truth. Freud coined the term "reality principle" for the deep drive or need to know what is true as a matter of survival. He contrasted this with the "pleasure principle" which is developmentally more primitive. Adults (ideally) can postpone what seems to yield maximum immediate pleasure by objectively reasoning about the "reality" of what is likely to bring acceptable pleasures over the long run. But one could argue for a stage in-between these two, a "meaning making" principle or drive, which refers to our need for things to make sense, or *feel like* they make sense, or *appear* to make sense, even sometimes at the expense of congruence with reality.

Plato once defined man as "a being in search of meaning." Developmental psychologist Robert Kegan writes: "It is not that a person makes meaning, as much as that the activity of being a person is the activity of meaning-making … the most fundamental thing we do with what happens to us is organize it. We literally make sense" (1982, p. 11). The human brain is a master pattern-matcher, and in its insatiable goal to make meaning it seems to care less about accuracy than sense making. As noted in Michael Shermer's "The Believing Brain" (2011), mind/brain theorists believe that the mind has evolved to detect faint patterns in noisy data, as often as not fooling itself, because overestimating possible dangers has an evolutionary advantage over underestimating those dangers. Nothing is lost if one freezes in fear upon mistaking a vine for a snake; but missing a snake waiting in the shadows could be deadly. At the extreme, this propensity to see patterns where there is only noise creates difficulties such as conspiracy theories, pseudo-science, and psychosis. Shermer calls the cognitive tendency to find patterns regardless of whether they are real "patternicity."

It turns out to be not so necessary that most of our beliefs are accurate, and even less important that we can *derive* accurate beliefs from scratch. The most important true beliefs are handed to us or taken care of by society – along with an abundance of non-truths. We live in a world where it is reasonable to trust that our food is safe, that the man-eating animals are locked within zoos, and that we will be warned or protected from the vast majority of dangers. It is impossible to question every belief and research every statement that is important to us – most of what we believe (or act as if we believe) must be taken for granted, so that the potentially infinite onslaught of doubt, scrutiny, and ambivalence can be evaded.

Thus, modern survival, reproductive success, and happiness depend much more on how well one assimilates into social structures and belief systems than on one's ability to detect patterns *accurately* in the world of ideas. (Of course, in the *concrete* domains of physical survival and object manipulation, our brains need to process information very accurately to be able to, for example, drive a car, grow and harvest food, or recognize what an infant needs.)

If fact, one could argue that *appearing* to be *right* or feeling and demonstrating *confidence* hold more value in the world of social interactions than does accuracy (truth). Because we are social animals the meaning-making drive to be "right" includes both the truth-relative sense of the word and the moral sense – we don't want to be wrong *or bad*. The world of social interactions operates largely through a 2ndPP action logic, within which we exchange stories or narratives – idea streams that need not stand up to the rigors of "proof" (3rdPP action logic). At 3rdPP we become more interested in critical thinking and verifiable truths, and question traditional narratives and popular beliefs. Although we may not need 3rdPP and higher action logics for the vast majority of daily life, 3rdPP and higher levels of complexity are *increasingly* necessary for individuals and cultures as social and global predicaments accelerate in complexity, scale, and gravity.

The mind's meaning-making function discovers patterns primarily by matching incoming information to what is known and anticipated. Recent models of cognition portray the brain as a "predictive" organ that helps organisms adapt by minimizing the error between what it predicts will be experienced and what is actually experienced (Seth, 2015; Bar, 2009). So, while the pattern-matching capacities of the brain may seem ingenious, usually one is trying to confirm existing patterns rather than discover new patterns – the mind's brilliance is typically spent bending reality to fit one's models rather than constructing them anew. We seek confirmation as much as truth, with the truth drive (3rdPP) acting as an occasional reality-check against the meaning-making drive (2ndPP) and the pleasure drive (1stPP).

Ideas are more meaning-*full,* or feel more important, when they are more closely related to one's personal needs, survival, values, identity, and sense of purpose (i.e. with one's ego). It also appears that more *abstract* ideas attain more meaning – which is somewhat problematic because more abstract ideas operate further from empirical reality and are more difficult to validate. In other words, at least in conversational contexts, ideas that are the most difficult to validate can feel like the most important ones to have a strong opinion about. This clearly has implications for spiritual and religious thought.

Critical thinking has an uneasy relationship to the "questions of ultimate concern" that drive spiritual and religious discourse. These are questions about "the meaning of life," including themes on the origins and ultimate ends of people and the cosmos as a whole; and ethical questions about right and wrong behavior. For such questions humanity has used science to produce partial answers, but full-bodied "answers" remain in the realm of metaphysical thinking (e.g. in religions).

The cloud, the clearing, and the clown of unknowing. The mirror image of meaning is the unknown. The humility of knowing *that* one does not know is an important aspect of post-metaphysical thinking – in this text we go further to explore some *sources* of belief fallibility. We are reminded of the "known knowns, known unknowns, unknown unknowns, and unknown knowns" popularized through statements by United States Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and various theories of solving "wicked problems." "Known unknowns" relates to uncovering sources of fallibility (or indeterminacy) to perceive some of the contours defining the penumbra of one's ignorance. "Unknown knowns" refers to ignored or denied "truths" held in the shadowy depths of the unconscious. Fischer and Stein use the metaphor of *dark knowledge* for known unknowns, i.e. "knowledge of ignorance" (borrowed from the concepts of dark matter and dark

energy invented by physicists as place-holders for the invisible 90% of the stuff-of-the-universe that we have practically no understanding of yet).

Poet John Keats coined the term *negative capability* for the skill or predisposition of tolerating, or even delighting in, uncertainty, ambiguity, unpredictability, and paradox. I.E. "when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts – without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (1817). As Keats knew, negative capability is useful well beyond the realm of poetry. Negative capability (and thus post-metaphysical thinking) includes the "*informed and active humility"* mentioned above, in which the sources of indeterminacy are better understood so that knowledge can be more adaptive and resilient. It is not enough to acknowledge that "the map is not the territory" (an injunction not to confuse theories and ideals for reality), but we must understand as precisely as we can *how/where/when/why* our maps differ from the territory – impossible to do completely but essential nonetheless.

The contemporary understanding of the mind is that it not only *constructs* knowledge but, just as importantly, it acts like a lens or filter that *limits* the boundless expanse of conscious thoughts and sensory data possible at any moment. Cognitive resources such as memory, speed, and processing power are finite, so the mind must select only the fragments that seem most relevant to one's needs – and discard the rest. One can balance the *negative* capability of being open, curious, and accepting of the unknown with the *positive* capability of, metaphorically speaking, *characterizing and calibrating* the coloring or distortion introduced by the lenses, filters, and fabricators within the mind. One can then more intentionally participate in a perpetual trialectic between learning, knowing that one doesn't know, and correcting faults in one's understanding.

Unknowing is a favorite topic of sages, pundits, and spiritualists. Historian Daniel Boorstin said: "The greatest obstacle to discovery is not ignorance, it is the illusion of knowledge." *The Cloud of Unknowing* is a book of spiritual guidance thought to have been written in the late 14th century that counsels: "I urge you, go after experience rather than knowledge. On account of pride, knowledge may often deceive you, but this gentle, loving affection will not deceive you. Knowledge tends to breed conceit, but love builds. Knowledge is full of labor, but love, full of rest." (Butcher & Acevedo, 2009).

The early 21st century specter of a "post-truth" society is not only about the prevalence of deliberate falsehoods and "bullshit" (i.e. not caring about whether a statement is true or false, as discussed in Harry Frankfurt's 2005 popular philosophical treatise "On Bullshit"). It arises in part because society is becoming increasingly aware of the fallibility of knowledge, including scientific findings and "facts" offered in the media. Texts on the subject of "everything you know is wrong" have been increasing in recent decades. The post-metaphysical skill of negative capability has become a crucial tool for navigating the dissonance-creating complexity of modern culture (this is discussed from a developmental perspective in Robert Kegan's *In Over Our Heads*, 1994).

In this text we emphasize a type of unknowing that is not so much about discarding obsolete beliefs as discarding obsolete *certainty or fixation* upon beliefs; or developing the general skills of negative capability and unknowing. It is a common complaint that humility is in short supply, but psychological studies have shown how pervasive and unremitting overconfidence can be. Cognitive scientists have studied the related phenomena of the Overconfidence Effect and the

Dunning–Kruger effect. In the former it has been found, for instance, that for many common tasks, when someone is 90% confident that they are correct, there is a 50% chance that they are wrong (Moore & Healy, 2008); and that 93% of American drivers rate themselves as better than average drivers (Svenson, 1981). In the Dunning–Kruger effect, it has been shown that those with the least ability or knowledge are often the most likely to overestimate their ability (Kruger & Dunning, 1999).

Above we describe unknowing as a noun, but it can also be a verb: *un-knowing*, also called *unlearning*. These refer to using meta-cognitive skills to determine that a practice or belief is wrong or no longer useful. Some of what one learns turns out to be non-useful or harmful, and, once noticed, calls to be "unlearned." Depending on the situation, unlearning might take the form of re-training, re-education, group-reflection, psychotherapy, meditation, etc. "Spiritual clarity" is my term for the incremental results of this unlearning, healing, clearing, deconstruction, or "shadow work" – as discussed more in the Appendix. The process is also called "releasing complexity" (see Roy, 2018).

Importantly, negative capability and unlearning are closely tied to social and relational realities. Elsewhere in this text we emphasize the relationships between negative capability and listening, curiosity, vulnerability, and collective "self-emancipation." As pointed out by Hans Kögler (a Habermasian scholar), taking a reflective stance on a relational encounter (which he calls "self-distanciation") implicates a radical openness to the unknown (which some call *beginner's mind*). Kögler says "the self … abandons itself … to a [dialectical] process of understanding those results and challenges it cannot foresee or determine" (1999, p. 272).

Echoing Kögler's ideas, educational theorist Peter Elbow (2005) critiques how "critical thinking" is taught in the schools. It is presented as a type of skeptical thought that is predominantly directed at others, and too infrequently used to question one's own ideas and world-view. "[The] disciplined practice of doubting all views" (p. 3) that is held out as a standard for rational thought, rather being a tool for greater understanding and expansion of knowledge, too often becomes a shield for protecting one's own world-view. He asks: Why not also have disciplined practices of trying on all views? He suggests a practice he calls "The Believing Game" to strengthen this skill. This supports avoiding the two extremes of *dogmatism*, which is to be unskilled at doubting, and *skepticism*, which is to be unskilled at believing. In the Believing Game one gains the right to critique another only after first "dwelling with" and "dwelling in" another's words and world. He notes that "when readers fail to read critically it is not usually that they believe everything, it is that they are unengaged in any way; not dwelling in or critiquing anything" (p. 3).

In our exploration of spiritual beliefs and spiritual modes of thinking, we will explore the role of the magical strata of consciousness, a realm saturated with mystery, awe, and paradox (and sometimes trembling and vertigo). The wise individual can open to such experiences with openness and even *humor*. The *Clown* archetype is an important friend in navigating the realms of unknowing, uncertainty, and paradox.

Next we show how magical thinking and mythical thinking are components of metaphysical thinking, and argue that they are actually important parts of the reason-able mature life. *Post*-metaphysical thinking sees (some of) the *limitations* of magical and mythical thinking, and it also

recovers (some of) their useful elements that have been hidden, repressed, or suppressed in modern 3rdPP cultures.

Lest the reader jump to conclusions, I will *not* claim that *all* mystical experiences or metaphysical thinking can be attributed to "magical" or "mythical" thinking. But some of it is, and our developmentally oriented overview of magical and mythical thinking will establish groundwork for later elaborations on post-metaphysical thought.

Magical, Mystical, and Metaphysical Thinking

Meaning-making in Magical, Mythical, and Rational Thinking

"Magical Thinking" is a many-faced topic in spiritual inquiry. The term can be used to denounce an idea as unsophisticated, but it is also used to refer to an important capacity that is lost to most of us moderns, while yet preserved in artists, spiritual adepts, and aboriginal peoples. In this chapter we explore magical, mythical, mystical, and metaphysical "thinking" from a developmental perspective, and chart the gifts and weaknesses of these action logics as we consider what post-metaphysical thinking might look like. Note that in this text the term "thinking" is not restricted to logical/rational cogitation, but is meant to holistically include emotion, intention, and intuition.

Magical thinking (1stPP). Magical thinking points to modes of cognition that corresponds to the 1stPP action logic, is predominant in 1-4 year olds, and continues in some form in all of us. It is hypothesized to have been the dominant mode of cognition for pre-agricultural mankind, and remains as a layer of mental operations within all cultures. In "The Seven Laws of Magical Thinking" Matthew Hutson (2012) describes magical thinking as an inability to clearly differentiate the subjective from the objective worlds. The world of interior imagination and the world of exterior sensation are merged (undifferentiated) and confused. The monster under the bed seems very real; the stuffed animal is a friend who seems quite alive. The sense of self is merged with intimate others (at first with the mother). Association is confused with causation, creating a world of incomprehensible beings and forces. Time and space are cognized only primitively, and one lives in a world of present-moment, where memories of past and imaginations of future merge with (are projected onto) perceptual reality.

The magical world is emotionally potent, and from a neuroscientific perspective is more intimately linked to the primitive (mammalian/reptilian) functions of the brain. Within magical thinking feelings, including fear, hunger, longing, bliss, and confusion, inundate one's consciousness – and actions are impulsive and reflexive. One also experiences much of the world with awe and wide-eyed fascination; so much of the world is larger and more powerful than one's self. Lacking power and understanding, the things that care about us, e.g. our parents, seem like gods and angels; and the things that don't, e.g. the thunder cloud or the neighbor's barking dog, appear as daemons and monsters. One has little access to self-control or self-reflection. Thought is primarily associative – the child's brain is building millions of associative connections but has not yet built layers that substantially monitor or inhibit those associations. If a clown scares her, then anything reminding her of a clown will trigger fear – this action logic does not wonder why, it just reaches for, runs from, or freezes.

Adults can tap into magical modes of reasoning with both positive and negative effects. On the negative side: one may feel helpless or terrified in the face of something that is actually not life-threatening; one may let one's "amygdala hijack" the rational self and react from raw emotion; one might engage in fetishes that transform dark corners of the imagination into objects desperately sought after. On a more positive side, one may sense the tree or the moon as a living being or spiritual presence that one is intimately connected to. One might access a feeling of oneness with others and with the universe as a whole, or re-experience the timeless spaceless infinity of the "now." One can appreciate how nature is awe-inspiring, miraculous, and sacred.

Language and symbols were first invented in cultures operating predominantly at the level of magical consciousness. The lines between interior and exterior were blurred, and "real" powers were attributed to words and symbols. These include powers that transcend time and space. Incantations, invocations, mantras, prayers, voodoo dolls, divinations, and sacred objects draw upon this level of consciousness – worldviews in which the laws of science as we know them do not apply. Objects and symbols are felt to have some un-measurable essence giving them power and significance. To speak or name a thing gives one power over it; and to incant a powerful thing gives one power over other things. Religions today still rely on such modes of thought.

Other manifestations of magical thinking are more controversial because modern adults might argue about what is real vs. imaginary. Modern New Age culture includes beliefs in angels and spirits; and in the healing powers of crystals, prayers, sounds, and infinitely diluted homeopathic solutions. For many of these things we don't know for sure what is real or true. But what we *can* do is clarify the modes of reasoning (explanation and discourse) that are being used. If the primary justification is from gut feeling, instinct, or intuition, then we are in the realm of 1stPP magical thought.

To say that something comes from magical thinking does not necessarily mean that it is false, or imaginary, or wrong-headed. Some aspects of the world are so complex or unknown that a 1stPP approach is the best one can do to have it make any sense at all. Some things *may* actually exist in a meta-*physical* realm that is in between subjective and objective, or neither subjective nor objective, and thus not be amenable to the developmentally later 3rdPP modes of reason and validation. "Magic(k)" *could* be real, but if so we understand practically nothing about how it works. Some draw specious connections from magical worldviews to scientific worldviews, e.g. through quantum mechanics or n-dimensional space-time, but at bottom these are still merely metaphorical appropriations of empirical science, not actual science (except for conclusions drawn through rigorous scientific methods).

The more sophisticated 3rdPP modes of reason tend to be more accurate, produce more reliable results, and allow for more stability of agreement, but they can also be experienced as dry and lifeless if the magical level of consciousness is disregarded. Raw intellect can also produce self-centered, materialistic, and ethically flawed reasoning. One may choose to "re-enchant" one's experience and understanding by incorporating some magical thinking, which gives access to emotional vitality, sensory vibrancy, and a visceral sense of communion. But, ideally, one can at least try to be aware of *when* one is accessing magical thinking, and make "rational" choices about when to do so.

Mythical thinking (2ndPP). What some call *mythical* thinking, an aspect of 2ndPP, follows magical thinking developmentally. Each level rests on increasing complexity vs. the prior level. Magical thinking is about the apperception of "what is," i.e. recognizing objects and their properties; and establishing simple associative connections between them, often with strong emotional overtones (e.g. clown $< - >$ scary). Mythical thinking includes *directional* associations and *chains* of associations, which allow for constructing narratives and procedures, and understanding causation. Here the child, or the primitive culture, inhabits a social world organized around norms, rules, laws, goals, stories, and myths that are handed down from authorities or handed across from peers. Mythical thinking signals a move from "what is" in the moment into the why/how/when of narrative structures that explicitly consider past and/or future. At 2ndPP the answers to why/how/when are usually given rather than discovered or invented (as doing so usually demonstrates a 3rdPP).

As alluded to earlier, mythical thinking, perhaps better called the story-telling action logic, is the primary level for day-to-day social and personal meaning making. Though the meaning of a situation or idea is in part related to the "What are the objects and their properties?" of the magical level, meaning is usually understood in terms of the "Why/how/when/who?" of (2ndPP) narratives. 2ndPP includes the "dramatic" elements of assigning blame/praise, dominance/submission, success/failure, hero/villain, etc. to characters and roles in real and imagined scenarios. Narratives fashion a coherent whole from their elements, usually through a structured arc such as beginning-middle-conclusion.

1stPP operates through impulse and gut feeling, while at 2ndPP adequate understanding includes causes and reasons – even if these do not hold up to 3rdPP standards of validity because they are taken from authority figures, sacred texts, or social norms.

Though magical thinking is associated with children and primitive cultures, mythical thinking underlies much of today's (conventional) culture and society. Religions, bureaucracies, and socio-political identities are based primarily on hierarchical authority structures, stable systems of rules and norms, and shared stories.

Rational thinking (3rdPP). Rational thinking is the next developmental phase. Here thinking becomes not only more abstract and creative, but also more "formal." In part, this means that the validity of a claim or idea can depend more on its *form* than its content. Ideas are justified based on the *method* used to derive them. Mathematical proofs and engineering design methods rely on following valid methods – if a valid method is followed then we tend to trust the outcome, even if the outcome is surprising and non-conventional. We focus on *how* someone arrives at a conclusion, not *what* the conclusion is. The quintessential example is the "scientific method" for arriving at truths through reliable, replicable, observations, within which logically or mathematically rigorous methods are applied.

Here we can note another sense of "formal" reasoning: the sense of being somewhat impersonal and standardized or universal, as in "formal" speech or attire. Rational thinking includes the ability to consider what *any/all* reasonable persons would conclude, given the same information. Formal reasoning appeals not to a specific authority figure but to the impersonal generalized rational human (an abstraction).

In rational thinking one escapes from the confines of convention and norms based on the past. With a heightened sense of autonomy one imagines new possibilities and strives toward the highest, deepest, largest, most productive, or most original achievement that is practically reachable. The products of rational thinking create a world full of ever more unique and diverse objects, people, and phenomena. At the same time, 3rdPP can have difficulty making sense of, or building theories of, aspects of reality that cannot be empirically measured or that do not fit well into discrete categories. At "post-rational" (or "post-formal", 4thPP) thinking, one begins to see the drawbacks of the rational mind, but that is skipping ahead in our story.

The interplay of action logics. In our exploration of post-metaphysical thinking we want to develop sensitivity to the action logic being used in any moment: magical, mythical, or rational (or locate action logics along a more refined developmental spectrum). This is because answering the questions "Is it real?" or "Is it true?" depends on the mode of reasoning one chooses to apply. We move among these modes fluidly without being aware of it. In addition each mode does not so much replace the prior, but *builds upon* it organically. Though we may have well-developed rational thinking, we apply it in surprisingly little of our day. As indicated above, most of the time we rely on existing habits, conventions, and our trust in others – from 2ndPP. One may have an understanding and appreciation of rational thinking, but still blithely follow the conclusions of trusted scientists, engineers, journalists, etc. Who has the time or capacity to cross-check all the knowledge one consumes? So we can make a distinction between one's thinking *capacity* to use 3rdPP as needed, vs. one's *operating* mode of thought in the moment, which, much of the time, need not exert the extra effort to engage the expensive rational cognitive functions.

For example, consider the scientist. A successful scientist will use 3rdPP rational thinking to formally validate her and others' experiments and conclusions; and to creatively explore novel territory. Her rational scientific thinking depends upon a community of the adequate being able to repeat and verify claims following established methods. But the very ability to form a stable *community*, or hold to *established* methods relies on a foundation of individual and cultural capacities at the mythical/conventional/story-telling 2ndPP. Her trust in a scientific community, as opposed to, say, a religious one, comes from some appreciation of the scientific method, so in one sense that trust comes as much from an early 3rdPP as from the 2ndPP (remember that the action logics are general categories describing average correlations within complex human behaviors – they have no exact definition or delineations). Through her mythical thinking she feels herself to be a devoted and valuable member of a research community carrying forward in a historical lineage of inquiry that benefits mankind. The scientist can also access a feeling of awe and reverence for the natural world through her magical thinking.

Each action logic operates under its own rules. The scientist does not use formal logic or run experiments (3rdPP methods) to "prove" that she should: use established methods; trust her colleagues; or allow her sense of awe and reverence for nature to motivate her pursuit of science. These choices are primarily based on 1stPP or 2ndPP action logics. The scientific endeavor can become warped or pernicious if it is undertaken purely by the rational mind in the absence of (i.e. in denial or suppression of) earlier levels of consciousness. A scientist, or a technology company, that is not grounded in identifying with and contributing to a community or and has no reverence for the miracles that constitute our world, is a potential threat to all.

A psychologically healthy and ethically congruent 3rdPP orientation naturally *includes* (i.e. does not exclude) positive elements of 1stPP and 2ndPP action logics. And it is at 4thPP that one can *understand the importance* that such a balance brings, and consciously reflect on the developmental mode(s) of reasoning that one uses. 4thPP advances and rectifies the scientific process (or any 3rdPP mode) by understanding its limitations within different contexts. Kegan describes developmental progress in terms of subject-to-object shifts: 4thPP is a move from living and working *within* the scientific paradigm (or any 3rdPP worldview) to seeing science *as* a paradigm, or as a limited tool that one chooses when to use.

4thPP and the counter-cultural moment. Habermas' definition of post-metaphysical thinking includes not only a more reflective awareness of knowledge and belief (which we could call meta-knowledge), but also a more reflective awareness of *feeling* – a deeper empathy and self-empathy that senses the motivational and affective qualities of the life-world (we could call this meta-feeling). Post-metaphysical thinking constitutes an increase in the depth as well as the complexity of thought, where here "depth" points to wisdom about the human condition that is grounded in self-understanding. It is a move beyond the purely logical and efficient search for truths and achievements that characterize 3rdPP worldviews, into a more holistic appreciation of the complexities, interdependencies, fallibilities, and vulnerabilities of human endeavors. One sees how knowledge – even scientific knowledge – is shaped by human interests, cognitive biases, identity affiliations, and power dynamics.

The capacities inferred within Habermas' description of post-metaphysical thinking correspond very well with the capacities that developmental psychology describes as 4th Person Perspective. Though we may often use 4thPP and post-metaphysical thinking synonymously in this text, more technically, 4thPP points to the *many* changes in consciousness observed as one moves beyond 3rdPP, whereas post-metaphysical thinking refers to the subset of those emerging capacities related to how one understands knowledge, belief, and truth (i.e. the reflective meaning-making functions of the 4thPP mind).

Whereas 3rdPP can see the flaws in mythical and magical belief systems, such as literal interpretations of sacred texts, 4thPP can sense the fallibilities in *all* belief systems. At 4thPP one is aware of the limits of logic and abstraction (3rdPP), and sees the need to integrate the earlier developmental capacities of 1stPP and 2ndPP, which, for most in modern cultures, have been partially repressed or disowned. Psychologically, at 4thPP one desires to make transparent, and integrate, all aspects of the self. Culturally, this corresponds to the desire to become more intimate with all humans, regardless of status or identity.

What we might glibly call "spiritual thinking" can occur at any developmental level, since "questions of ultimate concern" seem eternally relevant. Clearly, the cultural reproduction of traditional religious beliefs is a manifestation of mythical/conventional (2ndPP) thinking. At 3rdPP one might reject religion altogether, but alternatively one might discover ways to maintain the benefits of social solidarity and an ethically-driven life that is found in religious communities, while abandoning distasteful mythic and magical literalism and allowing for more self-determination.

The emergence of 4thPP more widely within culture corresponds to the "consciousness expanding" trends of the New Age, progressive counter-culture, post-modern, and Cultural Creative movements of the mid-20th century. The "spiritual but not religious" sensibility can thus be characterized in terms of a development from 3rdPP into 4thPP in individuals and cultures. Within its critique of modernity is a calling for more emotional and "spiritual" vibrancy in life. This call for a deeper sense of meaning in life includes a desire for more intimacy with, and response-ability for, oneself, others, and the natural world. 4thPP can motivate a recovery and integration of magical (and to some extent mythical) thinking – to re-enchant the life-world, activate the "imaginal" mind and the sense of the sacred, as well as deepen consciousness into a holism that frees repressed and suppressed layers of the self.

The upshift from any developmental worldview to the next can be accompanied by a strong critique, backlash, or push-away from the prior level. Ideally the positive aspects of what is pushed away are eventually re-integrated, but some frustrations within contemporary spirituality can be traced to the lack of such re-integration. The transition to 4thPP often comes with a critique or outright rejection of some of the products of modernism, including scientific materialism, logical "positivist" thinking, capitalism, and hegemonic and extractive accumulations of power and resources. But the scaffolding that grounds life pragmatically, such as values for logical thinking, material needs, and valid authorities, can become as babies cast out with the dirty bathwater of modernity.

In the STAGES developmental theory the action logic levels roughly alternate between individual-focused and collective-focused. 1stPP is a self-oriented concrete stage, while 2ndPP includes the concrete skills of socialization (i.e. *collectives*). 3rdPP adds formal reasoning and abstraction skills, which is relatively oriented to individualized skills.

At 4thPP one develops skills in understanding systems, flows, trends, and constellations of ideas (i.e. *collectives of abstractions*, as opposed to 2ndPP concrete collectives). Topics such as systemic bias and racism, global/cultural "worldview" development, knowledge building communities; and methodologies for dialog, decision-making, and conflict resolution, move into to the foreground. Working with emergent collectives of abstractions (ideas) is necessarily more complex than thinking about individual ideas (or simple idea hierarchies or well-structured models).

When one enters into this territory one is, more forcefully than ever, confronted with the reality of alternative and conflicting perspectives, and sees that (3rdPP) rationality alone is not a sufficient vehicle for delivering truths sturdy enough to address many real problems. That is to say, that the post-rational critique or contextualizing of rationality itself does not "magically" or spontaneously arise at 4thPP – but rather it is a direct result of building the increased cognitive capacity to consider more complex constellations of ideas and perspectives.

It is within the 4thPP domain that modern forms of spirituality have formed (though of course entering a 4thPP does not require any particular "spiritual" focus). This re-emergence or re-invention of spirituality incorporated much from Eastern religions, and also tapped into contemplative, esoteric, and shamanistic aspects of all religious traditions. This brings us back to the metaphysical ideas illustrated in Exhibit A.

Because the integration of East and West, and the new levels of depth of consciousness being explored, is relatively new from a historical or anthropological perspective, we are still working out many of the "bugs" within post-modern forms of spirituality (i.e. approaches to "questions of ultimate concern"). We can identify two problems: (1) maintaining problematic forms of metaphysical thinking, including totalizing or foundational claims about ultimate or absolute realties and truths; and (2) the desire to re-incorporate magical thinking opens up possibilities for regression to earlier modes of thinking, rather than integrating them into higher forms of reason.

We will discuss the latter of these next, and return to the former in the succeeding section on "Mysticism and Logic."

Dangers of re-visiting magical and mythical thinking. Throughout this text we emphasize that more "primitive," i.e. developmentally earlier, action logics are critically important to a healthy psyche and a healthy culture; and that these earlier modes of thought are always active in one's consciousness, even if they are repressed or denied at the conscious level. But within 4thPP cultures there is often what Wilber calls a "pre-trans fallacy" in which a regression to earlier modes is confused with re-integrating of the earlier modes with higher modes.

This is complex territory but these issues are front and center in our culture's transition from 3rdPP to 4thPP, and for understanding contemporary spirituality; so we will take the time to explain three important principles.

(1) *Receptive vs. active phases*. We have so far mentioned but glossed over the fact that some developmental theories include *early and late halves* or stages of each person-perspective. O'Fallon's STAGES model in particular, separates 4thPP into levels 4.0 and 4.5. In the STAGES model the early (X.0) levels are *passive or receptive* in relationship to the new world of complexity and depth being opened up at that action logic; while the later (X.5) levels signify a more *active* engagement with, and more robust understanding of the new capacities. In this text the receptive/active refinement within each action logic is of minor importance for all levels *except* 4thPP. There is so much movement and turbulence in society at the 4thPP juncture that our discussion benefits from zooming in by an additional "click" and considering the difference between early and late 4thPP (Wilber and Beck call this interface the transition into "second tier," which is at 4.5 in our model).

We can frame the chaos and instability often seen in progressive cultural settings as early 4thPP (4.0) opening to a flood of new ideas, feelings, and values that have not yet been completely sorted out. Brand new powerful ideas can produce wide-eyed wonder, passionate but naive devotion, ideological aggression against the "old ways," and disorientation from an overwhelm of new objects that have not been ordered and prioritized. (For example, feeling distressed in deciding how to spread one's charity donation among the hundreds of progressive causes; or a leader becoming frozen when he needs to choose between the value of including everyone's voice and the value of protecting the vulnerable.) Its difficult to feel solidly "on one's feet," or gain a perspective on where one is at, when one first enters a new territory. As an idea moves from receptive to active modes we see it being better situated "in perspective," "in context," or "in proper proportion" to a wider world of practical considerations. It might take an individual many years, or a culture many generations, to transition from the early half of an action logic to the late half.

Fully achieving 4.5, for an individual or group, includes gaining experience using, tweaking, and coordinating 4.0's influx of new ideas, values, and awarenesses and becoming facile with them. It also includes re-integrating healthy elements of lower action logics that were pushed aside in the stretch from 3rdPP into 4thPP.

(2) *Developmental spread in groups*. We have said that a person who achieves any developmental level does not operate consistently at that level. Stressors and other factors can "downshift" cognition into earlier modes. In addition, many contexts do not require one's full capacity. Also, under special conditions, one can have "state experiences" that peak into stages later than the "center of gravity" of one's developmental maturity. Things get even more complicated when we use developmental levels to describe *cultures* (or groups).

Culturally, it requires a certain critical mass of human development to establish a stable self-replicating "groove" at any developmental level. It appears that for 4thPP this process began in the mid-20th century and, because 4thPP capacities are still maturing and spreading, the establishment of 4thPP culture is still in-process (though some scholars would say that there are stable manifestations of *early* 4thPP groups). Each succeeding developmental action logic supports a new set of value-orientations – for example 3rdPP ushered in values for scientific rigor, democratic decision making, and self-determination; while 4thPP is ushering in values of social justice, ecological sustainability, holism, and deep intimacy. The exact values that emerge at any level for any culture are not predetermined, but *whatever* emerges (*if* development progresses) is marked by increased complexity and depth.

The key point to be made here is that once a developmental groove, along with its values and idea "memes," is established within a culture, individuals from *any* developmental level might be attracted to the *surface features* of the new sub-culture. And this is what we find. It explains why, at a board meeting for Green Peace, a gathering at Occupy Wall Street, or at a Buddhist meditation retreat, one can find individuals who embody the mature 4thPP action logic, including a highly rational capacity for wise thought and well-integrated social-emotional skills; but we can also find individuals who were drawn in from other action logics. For example one may be drawn in through narcissistic authority-rebellion, pleasure-seeking, or magical thinking (1stPP); or to meet social solidarity or identity formation needs (2ndPP); or to cleverly exploit the credulous members of a group for personal gain (3rdPP). In sum, being in the, seemingly 4thPP, "spiritual but not religious" club of value-orientations does not guarantee that one is operating at any particular action logic.

(3) *Mystical experiences and early developmental levels*. As noted, the developmental or spiritual journey of life can include glimpses or stable experiences of profound states of oneness, emptiness, selflessness, expansiveness, and one-pointedness. These states are, understandably, associated with advanced levels of development, though Wilber and others have pointed out that one can have access to these sublime states from any developmental level. In the primary text on wisdom skills, I elaborate an argument that these states are better described in terms of one gaining access to developmentally *lower* (earlier) modes of being. In brief:

The new infant lives in a "booming buzzing" world of disorganized stimulus. Time, space, the stability of concrete objects, the sense of having a body, and the psychological ego are not yet constructed. This is a developmental phase prior to 1stPP magical thinking – we will call it 0thPP.

I propose that the sublime states associated with spirituality involve accessing modes of experience at 0thPP. At 0thPP "meaning-making" is about organizing *perception*, while 1stPP is about conception. Through technique, neurochemical manipulation, or bizarre strokes of luck, one who experiences sublime "spiritual" states has found a way to deconstruct, release, or slip underneath constructed mental structures in order to experience what awareness was like before the phenomena (space, time, ego, etc.) was ever constructed.

Clearly one does not (normally) completely regress to an earlier age, but the adult mind gains access to 0thPP though methods outlined above, and then *interprets* the experience according to one's established meaning-making habits. An experience of peeling away a primordial layer of conditioning (i.e. a construction) usually releases revelatory insights that can then be integrated in one's evolving wisdom. When foundational structure is loosened up or released, higher level structures (beliefs, etc.) that were built up assuming these structures can reorganize—sometimes very rapidly, in a flood of revelation.

One could make the argument that (a) having the *motivation* to search for these 0thPP experiences, (b) skillfully *interpreting* insights born of the experience, and/or (c) achieving *reliable access* to these states – all require relatively high levels of development. All of these things help explain why sublime spiritual or "peak" experiences are associated with advanced spiritual achievements. But it is important to also acknowledge that they first source from the lower 0thPP level.

The three phenomena noted above: (1) the receptive and unsteady nature of early 4thPP, (2) the fact that pre-4thPP action logics can be attracted to 4thPP, and (3) the idea that mystical experiences tap into lower, not higher, developmental capacities – each leads to some problematic possibilities in spiritual thinking, spiritual seeking, and spiritual practice for the "spiritual but not religious" culture. I will briefly describe some of these problems, because we cannot avoid them if we cannot sense them.

Entering into mythical and magical mind usually involves putting oneself (or part of oneself) into a receptive quasi-childlike state. In such a state, especially when people do this in groups, one sets aside or attenuates rational and critical thought processes and the strongly individuated self. One thus opens oneself, not only to psychological healing and spiritual nourishment, but also to being controlled or manipulated by others. One is not only more open to love and wonder, but is more vulnerable to becoming overwhelmed and confused. One may have greater access to "collective intelligence" and creative thinking, but is also more vulnerable to herd mentality and collective stupidity. With the rational mind suspended, one might more easily enjoy bliss, but when conflicts arise one may be less skilled in perspective taking dialogue, and imagining alternatives.

Lower level action logics are more naive socially, less skilled ethically, more self-centered, and more impulsive. The magical mind is magical in all of it positive connotations, but it is also weak in differentiating interior from exterior, and more likely to involuntarily project biases and shadows upon others. From within the magical layer of consciousness we are more likely to project perfection and majesty onto our teachers and guides. Cognition is more black-and-white and we are more impulsively attracted to the sparkling, the alluring, the charismatic, the awe-some.

In sum, entering into these realms can be disregulating and even dangerous if one does not simultaneously tend the pilot lights of reason in the background (3rdPP or 4thPP mind). My goal here is not to strike fear into the hearts of spiritual seekers. The risks I am pointing to are not horrible traps lurking around the dark corners of spiritual practice; they are usually the minor problems that the reader has no doubt already witnessed within oneself and in acquaintances. As our focus is on post-metaphysical thinking, the primary take-away is this: as and when spiritual thinking accesses magical and mythical action logics, it opens up to both the gifts and the dangers of these more primitive levels of consciousness, and, in particular for our inquiry, one opens oneself to pre-rational modes of believing and sense-making.

It is not simply a matter of ensuring that one maintains robust rationality while exploring magical consciousness, because it seems that to engage in the exploration one must create safe spaces where one can actually put aside doubt, the critical mind, defenses, and vigilant surveillance. One must actually travel into that territory to bring back its gifts. Aside from the practical matters of making sure the journey is safe, which is outside of our scope, what we are concerned about here is how those gifts are interpreted once brought home. For example, ideally one can reflectively differentiate and move skillfully between magical mind and rational mind as one assimilates and disseminates these gifts – whether they are retrieved through one's own magical journey, or received from a teacher sourcing *their* journey.

Mysticism and Logic

We bring our attention again to the metaphysical quotes in Exhibit A at the beginning of this text. In doing so we shift from day-to-day meaning-making conversations and the ideas that we adopt and adapt *from* mystics, sages, and philosophers, to the experiences *of* those mystics, sages, and philosophers – and how they communicate their insights. Or, a bit more mundanely, we turn to how *anyone* tries to make meaning and convey ideas plumbed from a radically deep encounter with What-Is – the territory of *mystical* experiences and revelations. As we will see, the *mystical* thinking implies a more sophisticated and abstract experience than magical thinking by itself.

In *Mysticism and Logic* Bertrand Russell describes metaphysics as "the attempt to conceive the world as a whole by means of thought" (Russell, 1917, p. 6). He says that metaphysical claims are based on a mixture of two distinct impulses: the mystical and the scientific. He notes how scholars often lean strongly in one or the other of these directions, while those in the middle struggle to reconcile these two impulses. Russell says that the "great philosophers" achieve an "intimate blending" of the two, a union that is "the highest eminence…that it is possible to achieve in the world of thought" (he offers Heraclitus and Plato as examples).

Russell describes several common characteristics of mystical knowledge in comparison with other types of knowledge and philosophical ideas, which I summarize as follows:

− *Intensity*: Mysticism has "a certain intensity and depth of feeling in regard to what is believed about the universe." It has a sense of "certainty and revelation." Though it sometimes uses logic to justify beliefs, the claims seem to come from "a way of wisdom, sudden, penetrating, coercive, which is contrasted with the slow and fallible [process of scientific reasoning]."

- *Insight and ineffability*: Mystics are attempting "an articulation upon the inarticulate experience gained in the moment of [insight or intuition]."
- *Introspective revelation*: There is a "sense of a mystery unveiled [and] revelation" of "a reality behind the world of appearances and utterly different from it." Truth and essence is found through profound introspective thought, not through sense experience.
- *Poetic*: Mysticism can be expressed in deeply poignant, poetic, or metaphorical prose.
- *Paradoxes*: It often plays with opposites and paradox, pointing beyond them to knowledge that resolves or harmonizes them (as in Heraclitus' "Good and ill are one.").
- *Universals*: It often deals with universals, infinites, essences, or foundational truths.
- *Unity and ultimate reality*: There is a common "belief in unity, and its refusal to admit opposition or division anywhere" – that "reality is one and indivisible." There is also commonly a belief that reality, or ultimate reality, is beyond time and space. This relates to the above-mentioned resolution of polarities, as past, present, and future become one.

These qualities are quite evident in the quotes in Exhibit A. Russell argues that, though the merging of the mystical and the scientific is a great achievement, it is difficult to do well, and poses a number of dangers. One danger is a tendency for the passion of the mystic to conflate "the good with the truly real" (i.e. conflate fact with value, which he claims Classical philosophers do all too often). Aristotle, for example said "earth and sun seek their proper path in the sky" – conflating science with a metaphysical implication that a higher purpose governs physical reality.

A second danger is that those who "are capable of absorption in an inward passion" can experience "the loss of contact with daily things [and] common objects." Some have held that a radical commitment to formal practices or renunciate lifestyle opens up a privileged access to sublime truths. An ability to think free of enculturated beliefs is a key component of inspiration and creativity, but distancing oneself from ordinary culture can also leave one trapped in a private world of ideas, drunk on an elixir of certainty, and unable or uninterested in coordinating with others' perspectives.

We can see from the previous sections that Russell is pointing to the ways that scholarly thinkers combine magical thinking, mythical thinking, and scientific thinking (1stPP, 2ndPP, and 3rdPP) – action logics or "language games" that each has its own rules of engagement and validation. (Russell wrote too early to have access to the theories of developmental actions logics that we understand today.) For example, Plato combined magical and scientific thinking in his attribution of an intelligence or intention upon the motion of the planets.

Russell describes a second, but related, mode of metaphysical thinking that relies on logic alone, without the necessity of authentic mystical experience, to flesh out abstract metaphysical ideas. Using our developmental frame we can describe this as the use of highly abstract concepts and formal logic, which come online at 3rdPP, but without a grounding in the scientific method that requires repeatable empirical methods and social validation through democratic peer critique (we could say that this logical but pre-scientific mode is a late 2ndPP or early 3rdPP mode of reasoning).

For example, theologians, whose cultural surround did not allow them to escape from magical and mythical thinking, offered numerous arguments "proving" the existence of God and deriving

the properties of divinity (Davidson, 1987; e.g. St. Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*). Russell describes a strain of thought, woven from Parmenides to Hegel and his disciples, that grounds mysticism in logic and abstraction. This strain describes reality as having an essentially "uncreated, indestructible, unchanging, indivisible" nature that is beyond time and space. Russell says that "logic used in the defense of mysticism seems to be faulty as logic [and renders such] philosophers incapable of giving any account of the world of science and daily life" (p. 15).

Even today there are many intellectuals who tread on similarly tenuous ground – confounding scientific reasoning and metaphysical reasoning. For example: theories about "consciousness" using quantum mechanics; and more extreme versions of the "anthropic principle" that reference the enigmatically improbable fundamental properties of the cosmos that allow matter and life to exist. Though this type of reasoning continues today, the "post-metaphysical turn" and the "embodiment turn" in philosophical thinking make it increasingly dubious to use logic and abstraction alone to make objective claims about the nature, origin, and purpose of the universe as a totality.

Yet, using formal logic but staying within the language game of 2ndPP, one *can* make valid arguments, i.e. *meaning-generative narratives*, about metaphysical phenomena. This is acceptable if the object of inquiry is explicitly outside the bounds of objective physical observation and measurement (that is to say, not merely subjective, but meta-physical). In fact, many of the "questions of ultimate concern" addressed by religion and spirituality may never be answerable objectively. But they can still be approached with post-metaphysical sensibility by, as we suggest in various ways in this text, including a humble acknowledgment of the limitations of the language game of whatever action logic is used.[3]

Along similar lines, in *Mysticism and Logic* Russell concludes that "while fully developed mysticism seems to me [a mistaken outcome of the emotions], I yet believe that by sufficient restraint, there is an element of wisdom to be learned by the mystical way of *feeling*, which does not seem to be attainable in any other manner [and which is] to be commended as an *attitude* toward life, not as a creed about the world" (p. 12; emphasis added).

Metaphysical Thinking and Action Logics

The 3rdPP action logic has several components, which are understood to usually arise in concert, i.e. in a coordinated way, but *can also* each develop along its own trajectory. In particular we can note abstract thinking and critical thinking – two main capacities of 3rdPP – can develop quasi-separately. For our purposes we will relate critical thinking to logical thinking and scientific thinking. These three capacities allow for a critique of 2ndPP dogmatic and authoritarian modes of reason; and they support autonomous belief-formation beyond conventional beliefs. *Abstract* thinking relates more to capacities of the imagination – allowing one to consider generalities and hypothetical objects, possibilities, and worlds that are not tied to concrete realities. The two are tied together; for example, "formal operational thinking" requires both abstractions and logical mental operations. But it is also true that critical and scientific thinking can become very

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[3] We should note that, contrary to the efforts of philosophers such as Popper, there is no clearly definable boundary for what claims or questions fall within the scientific method – but that does not diminish the need for epistemic humility.

sophisticated without *necessarily* being very abstract, and conversely, central to our conversation about metaphysical thought, abstract thinking can become very abstract without being tied to the empirical validation associated with critical and scientific thinking.

Lets look at abstraction more closely. Magical thinking (1stPP) is concrete in that it deals with objects-at-hand, whether real or imagined. Mythical thinking (2ndPP) is a bit more abstract, in that a story or narrative structure abstracts from particulars to create generalities. A narrative broadens the particular to a hypothetical or *generalized* time and place. Narratives also assemble a collection of concrete instances into a unified, though more abstract, whole.

Metaphysical thinking signals a movement into a fuller abstraction at 3rdPP. This may seem contradictory since it would appear that 3rdPP scientific and critical thinking expose and reject the magical/mythical aspects metaphysical thinking. But this is not necessarily the case, in part because, as mentioned above, abstract thinking can develop separately from empirical/logical scientific thinking. In metaphysical thinking the objects of thought are abstracted, not only beyond *particular* times and places, but also beyond *any/all* time and space. This is what characterizes the *meta*-physical realm – that it is beyond time and space, the dimensions that structure concrete reality. This allows for an even higher level of unification, or a deeper claim to foundations and essences, vs. narrative structures. As Russell says, this is an "attempt to conceive the world as a whole by means of thought" with a "belief in unity [in which] reality is one and indivisible."

Habermas, in describing metaphysical thinking, says that "The One and the Many', unity and plurality, designates the theme that has governed metaphysics from its inception [as far back as Plato]" (Habermas, 1992. p. 115). Metaphysical thinking privileges unity, the One – the Identity through which the diversity of the world can be reduced. Javier Aguirre notes that "Metaphysics responds...by tracing the plurality of beings back to one single and unique element...[it]...unites all innerworldly things and events as determinate and concrete parts of a totality" (2012, p. 23). In spiritual discourse this totality has taken many forms, including: God, Ground of Being, Emptiness, omnipresent Consciousness, The Good, Nature, First Mover, the Unconditioned, and Absolute Spirit.

In metaphysical thinking (3rdPP) the general-but-concrete elements of the narrative (2ndPP) structure "are removed from the dimensions of space and time, and abstracted into something first which, as the infinite, stands over and against the world of the finite and forms its basis" (Habermas, 1992, p. 45). Such unifying abstractions are placed in a domain sometimes thought of as the universal Mind, or into a non-substantial realm of perfect ideas or Ideals (as in Plato's supra-sensible hyper-real realm of Forms just outside the "cave" or ordinary reality). Aguirre, summarizing Habermas, concludes that metaphysics is "the doctrine of ideas that *equates being with thought*" (emphasis added).

Post-metaphysics includes and transcends the concerns of post-modern philosophers of the mid-20th century, who deconstructed essentialist, foundational, absolutizing, totalizing, and universalizing language and ideas – which were understood to usher in ideological belief systems, grandiosity, and "repressive metaphysical projections." It signals a move into 4thPP, which can take a reflective perspective on 3rdPP modalities.

Our discussion is not meant to imply that those quoted in Exhibit A are "at" and particular developmental level – in fact these spiritual teachers, as observed in various contexts, seem to be operating well above 4thPP, and to deeply understand both the 3rdPP scientific method and 4thPP critique of science and reason.

People have access to a range of developmental levels, though they tend to operate from a particular stable "center of gravity." When one achieves any higher action logic, one can make use of lower action logics – usually unreflectively, but sometimes intentionally. Wilber maps out a related developmental sequence of mystical "states." His "nature mysticism" corresponds roughly to 1stPP, "deity mysticism" to 2ndPP, "formless mysticism" to 3rdPP/4thPP, and "Nondual Isness" to yet higher stages (Wilber, 1996). His Wilber-Combs Lattice model (Wilber, 2006) illustrates that, theoretically, a person centered at any developmental stage can visit a range of mystical states, which is compatible with our notion that, for example, modern individuals can revisit the magical strata of their consciousness, and can also have a peak experience rising above there developmental center of gravity.

To summarize, *Mystical* thinking (or perception) can occur within either 2ndPP or 3rdPP (or later levels). As it is based in experience, it is grounded in the 1stPP cognitive layers that can metabolize raw experience to produce emotion-infused objects of awareness and feelings of awe, wonder, unity, and luminosity (as well as terror, hate, etc.). If thought stops at the level of experience, without trying to "make meaning" of them, we would call it a 1stPP action logic. If mystical experience produces mythologies, concrete narratives, and rules, then it is bound to 2ndPP action logics. If mystical experience produces absolutes and radical abstractions, as in the case of the quotes in Exhibit A and the mysticism discussed by Russell, then it is making use of 3rdPP action logics – a type of 3rdPP thinking that is not beholden to the empirical demands of scientific thinking. At 4thPP and above one understands the limits of abstraction and purely logical thinking, and appreciates more embodied orientations to consciousness.

All of this helps to contextualize the metaphysical statements in Exhibit A, and avoid some of the pitfalls of overcommitting to such language. But we don't yet have the linguistic resources to describe the wisdom they point to or come from in satisfying post-metaphysical language. As Western cultures assimilate the ancient Eastern spiritual "wisdom traditions," we have not yet developed a common vocabulary or conceptual framework that allows the sages quoted in Exhibit A to escape from the uncritically metaphysical foundations that they inherited from pre-modern traditions. That is, we have only begun to imagine truly post-metaphysical (4thPP and higher) forms of spirituality.

Interlude: Three Historical Arcs

To deepen our exploration of post-metaphysical thinking we will step back and situate it within historical arcs. Post-metaphysics includes a deeper appreciation of the limitations of human thought and reason – a deeper understanding of how the mind misleads one in the search for the true and the good. I will propose three narratives as partial truths that show how historical trends have brought us to a moment in history when post-metaphysical thinking is crucial, possible, and perhaps inevitable. These brief narratives are gross simplifications of ideas that are developed as well as critiqued in the scholarly literature, and I include them here only to suggest a context for

our investigation of, and advocacy for, post-metaphysical thinking. At the end of this chapter in the side-bar "Deeper Dive: Stories of Recapitulation" we include an additional set of mini-stories that puts our developmental model of human wisdom in another panoptic perspective.

(1) The Rise and Decline of Rationality

Narrative Arc #1 illustrates the unfolding story of human rationality as simultaneously a historical liberator and a looming menace. *First*, and most obviously, the faculty of Reason, associated with the scientific method and technological innovation, has birthed technical and scientific knowledge that has led to breathtaking advances that have alleviated many sources of suffering for much of humanity. What began as an effort to *defend* ourselves against the perilous forces of nature, for example with the inventions of fire, shelter, spears, and farming, increasingly became a project for *controlling* nature, bending it to our will. The resulting advances are undeniable today, as evidenced by, for example, the miracles of smart phones and social media, and overall increases in human lifespan and material wealth (Pinker, 2011). Also, the so-called Age of Reason (or Age of Enlightenment) in the 17th and 18th centuries included the development of democratic ideals and a belief in the autonomy and sovereignty of the individual as emancipatory forces against oppressive institutions and religions. The fruits of Reason have been substantial.

But *second*, and obvious to many but not all of us, humanity also faces new and unprecedented challenges, including weapons of mass destruction, climate change, species extinction, both famine and obesity, terrorism, and increasing rates of suicide and depression – most or all of which can be directly or indirectly blamed on the "progresses" that human Reason has wrought. Developmental theories of cultural change note that it is a perennial fact that each generation of "solutions" to human problems ushers in new challenges to be contended with (for example, the invention of money alleviated problems in the fluid exchange of value, but created quandaries related to debt). This has always been the case, but our historical moment presents a unique predicament.

The predicament is that, whereas once it might have been true that the challenges humans faced were mostly imposed upon them by nature, in modern times we have tamed, "mastered," or dominated nature to a great extent, and most of our current problems can be traced to *human* decisions, and thus linked to the nature of human reason and the workings of the mind. Thus, any project intending to steer humanity into a desirable future must focus on understanding the workings of the mind, i.e. understanding the nature and limitations of thinking, decision-making, affect, perception, etc. – in short understanding *human* nature.

Our geological epoch has been called the Anthropocene, a period in which human activity is the dominant force determining the future of the entire planet (Latour, 2014). It seems clear that continuing to only understand and control the exterior world will not save us from self-ruination – we must, as a species and as individuals – better understand ourselves.

Some might say that the global necessity to increase in self-understanding entails an *amplification* of the faculties of Reason, because it is ignorance, dogma, emotional impulsiveness, group-think, and irrationality that are at fault. Yet we can see that increases in raw intelligence,

technical knowledge, and mental complexity are just as likely to produce tragedy as wisdom. Others might say that it is care and compassion that are missing from the big picture – that a simple strengthening of the heart will counteract the defects of rationality ("all you need is love"). Yet the problems we face are too complex to be addressed by love alone, which can, by itself, be both blind and stupid (as in Trungpa's "idiot compassion" (2002)).

The developmental approach offers more nuance. While 3rdPP rationality can understand and tame irrational "passions," it also seems to have cast out many gifts of 1stPP and 2ndPP consciousness. It is at the 4thPP (a post-rational or trans-rational phase) that the limits of reason are seen through and the importance of integrating lower levels, including the genius of the unconscious, is deeply appreciated. 4thPP includes the "post-rational" (or meta-rational or trans-rational) ability to evaluate rationality (i.e. logic, abstraction, the scientific method, etc.) itself and choose when and how to use it.

4thPP (and beyond) marks the realm of post-metaphysical thinking. In sum, we have reached a time when it is critically important that we understand more about the human mind, and that includes a post-rational understanding of the limits (and appropriate uses) of rationality. Here are two quotes that underline this theme – that humanity needs, not only new ideas and knowledge, but a new *relationship to* our ideas and knowledge:

Albert Einstein: "the significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them."

David Bohm: "underneath [humanity's dilemmas] there's something we don't understand about how thought works [and what is needed is a] very deep [and] very subtle *awareness of thought itself*."

Jean Gebser (1985), a pioneer in devising developmental theories that apply to both individuals and cultures, used the term "mental structure" for our 3rdPP. He claimed that modern society exhibited a "deficient" form of the mental structures of consciousness because it rejects too much of the prior mythical and magical structures, resulting in the modern problems of isolation, alienation, and existential fear.

To return to our theme of spirituality: clearly the move into 3rdPP relates to humanity's partial outgrowing of simplistic religious dogmas and authority structures. The downsides of 3rdPP "progress" have inspired "Romantic" philosophical counter-movements that involve humanistic and "spiritual" intuitions about the essential roles of love, humility, service, simplicity, and creative expression for human thriving. Even when a tentative balance between the scientific and the romantic are found, for example in contemporary or New Age spiritual narratives, there is too often a problematic sense of certainty about ultimate realities (as in the mystical thinking described by Russell). This cannot escape from the critical weight of the post-metaphysical "turn" that questions metaphysical thinking. Thus, any sustainable believable spirituality (or religion) of the future must incorporate what we are learning about the limitations of human thought and belief at 4thPP.

(2) A Brief History of Belief Fallibility

Our second historical narrative arc illustrates how many of the limitations of reason have already been mapped out in detail. A post-metaphysical attitude includes an "incredulity toward meta-narratives" (Lyotard , 1979, xxiv) – i.e. a deep suspicion of grand ideas that seem to take a completely objective "view from nowhere" as if the individual making the proclamation could see the world clearly, free from personal or cultural bias (see Nagel, 1986).

Though this "incredulity" has been taken too far by some, into a cynical wholesale suspicion of rationality and a rejection of quests for the truth, post-metaphysics takes a more tempered approach. It acknowledges the fallibilities of logical thought and abstract ideas, while noting that robust relationships and societies require reason, dialogue, shared "stories," and leaps of the imagination into abstract ideas. Through the capacity of negative capability one can move from a stark "incredulity" toward metanarratives to a healthy "suspicion" of them – that allows them to be used cautiously.

What follows is our second narrative or arc, a "Brief History of Belief Fallibility," in which we discern a historical progression in uncovering multiple layers of indeterminacy in reason. This trend situates us at a moment ripe for a new humility – a generalized critique of over-confidence (think again about the metaphysical claims in Exhibit A). It roughly orders the sources of fallibility from the easier to apprehend to the more difficult. Following suit with the rest of the text, this argument takes the form of a quasi-developmental sequence.

Since Antiquity sages have pondered the nature of knowledge – asking how we can know what is true. A consistent thread in Western philosophy, from the ancients up to the Modern period, placed a high value on Reason, and assumed that the mind, through logic and refined imagination, could discover pure, universal, transcendent truths.

The above-mentioned Age of Enlightenment (or Age of Reason) included the development of the scientific method and democratic ideals – rationality and formal reasoning methods were valorized and refined. The era was motivated by a deeper understanding of the problematic influences of *emotion, bias, and ideology* on belief and knowledge. Reason, including appeals to logic and empirical data, were found to be superior foundations for belief and social progress, as opposed to appeals to authority, passion, intuition, dogma, or common knowledge, which dominated earlier world-views. (This trend can be traced back to the Classical period of ancient Greece, which temporarily lost momentum during the intervening Dark Ages, according to orthodox historical interpretations).

During this period there was an ongoing philosophical battle (which persists today in some corners of philosophy) between those who thought reason should be based on sense experience (roughly speaking, the Realists and Empiricists) vs. those who believed that logic and "pure reason" was paramount (roughly speaking, the Idealists and Rationalists). The former emphasized the *fallibilities of reason*, pointing to how reason can involve bias, contradictions, and beliefs not borne out in reality. The latter emphasized the *fallibilities of sense data*, pointing to how the senses can mislead and err, including sensory illusions and the imperfections of measurement.

Immanuel Kant is known as the first to reconcile (though incompletely) these disparities, by noting how both perception *and* logic were indeed fallible; and that universal *underlying structures of thought* systematically distort and set limits upon both experience *and* reason (these structures include how the mind conceives of time, space, sequence, and causality). The emerging scientific method itself, seemed to include a perfect balance of perceptual and rational faculties (though it was not applicable to all domains).

It seemed for a brief moment that Reason, as a dialectic between logic and sense-data, could thus be saved. But philosophers from the Romantic tradition (and later the Existentialists), valuing emotion and intuition, continued to point out how reason alone was an insufficient and impoverished tool for addressing the deeper issues of life. They noted how scientific materialism had created various social and existential ills. Though one can note a dialectic of alternating corrective swings between rational/positivist and romantic/intuitivist trends, scientific rationalism always won the day (in the West), spurned in each generation by new technological advancements.

The narrative so far marks the height of Modernist thinking (though "modernism" continued to advance in terms of its products). It maps the conquering of the 3rdPP worldview over earlier worldviews (1stPP and 2ndPP). Reason was understood to overcome the problematic influences of emotion, intuition, and dogma – i.e. magical and mythical thinking. But then, as Reason was increasingly turned back upon itself, its majestic stronghold began to relentlessly deteriorate.

Early on came Charles Darwin (1809-1882), whose theories of evolution exposed reason as – not a transcendental or pure capacity – but a practical and somewhat arbitrary set of cognitive tools cobbled together over eons as animals evolved to meet the changing demands of survival and reproduction. In the god-less world of evolution, how could such a process produce a "pure" intellect able to find ultimate truths? The – from the eyes of scientific materialism – horrific slide from modernism toward post-modernism had begun. (Not to mention the irreparable shocks to religious fundamentalism.)

Then came Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), who exposed the unconscious and its unsavory and unavoidable influences on reason and belief. He showed us that behavior, cogitation, and belief exist at the tip of a cognitive iceberg, grossly influenced by a deep dark mass of complex and conflicting processes that one cannot be aware of, never mind control. This notion is such a radical insight that, to this day, even most who intellectually believe that it explains human nature do not experience *themselves* as harboring a vast invisible sub-mind.

Meanwhile, even in analytic philosophy, mathematics, and computational theory, the three bastions of Pure Reason, hard limits on reason were definitively proven. Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem, Tarski's Indefinability Theorem, and Turing's Halting Thesis, in various ways, proved that any complex system of logical statements (or beliefs) contains contradictions, i.e. is *illogical* (Hofstadter, 1980). In addition physical scientists including Lorenz studying the "Butterfly effect" in chaos theory, Einstein studying the cosmological warping of space-time, and Heisenberg with his quantum "uncertainty principle," showed us how physical reality itself surpasses the mind's ability to grasp it in its entirety. It seemed that certainty was headed for certain demise.

Then, in the mid-20th century, a parade of postmodernists (and post-structuralists) including Derrida and Foucault, continued the dethroning and deconstructing of Reason by exquisitely showing (1) how it is deeply biased by invisible cultural norms and historical contingencies, and (2) how language and symbolic thought, the basis of knowledge production and reproduction, harbor grave indeterminacies and logical inconsistencies.

The final blows in the rumble to decenter Reason came from cognitive scientists in the late 20th century. Thousands of empirical studies have illustrated deep fallibilities in memory, perception, awareness/attention, rationality, and self-understanding, including a litany of "cognitive biases" describing the "bounded rationality" that even the most advanced scholars, intellects, and spiritual adepts are not immune to (e.g. see Kahneman et al., 1982; Ariely, 2008; Shermer, 2011; Sunstein, 2002; Simon, 1957). It is now incontrovertible that we construct beliefs about reality with great fallibly, i.e. we cannot perceive or deduce beliefs about reality with anything approaching complete "accuracy."

In the 21st century post-modern world we find ourselves struggling to cope with the implications of these revelations. The de-centering exposure of reason's fallibilities (in two senses – removal from central importance, and forcing one off-balance) has led many to relativism, nihilism, or cynicism – or to a head-in-the-sand regression to an imagined safety of pre-rational ideologies and world-views. We struggle with a "post-truth" culture, and for those who don't want to throw the baby of rational and democratic thinking out with the bathwater of Reason's flaws, it can be difficult to find rays of hope. But a path forward has been charted in several communities of theory and practice, as we discuss later.

(3) An Evolution in Understanding Ideas vs. the Real

Our third historical narrative suggests that the story of philosophy can be told as a journey of increasing sophistication in how humanity differentiates and integrates the subjective realm of interiors vs. the objective realm of the exteriors – i.e. *ideas vs. the real*. Because developmental frameworks allow us to map the progression of complexity in action logics within *individuals* to the cultural/anthropological course of *history*, we will start by illustrating this idea in terms of the individual, and then extend it to the historical.

As noted, at the magical (1stPP) level of development the self has yet to clearly differentiate exterior from interior realities. The monster under the bed feels real, and if the child sees that a playmate is sad she may suddenly find herself inexplicably sad as well. Though the capacity to differentiate interior thoughts and images from exterior reality establishes itself in childhood, the developmental project of differentiating interior from exterior realities (as well as coordinate and integrate them) continues at ever more subtle levels.

At the magical thinking level (2ndPP, even in the adult) one believes that the stories of one's culture and religion are more or less literal and accurate (*introjection*). One also tends to *project* one's interior feelings and beliefs upon the world, assuming that they are or should be shared by others. One engages in wishful thinking, surprised and disappointed when the world fails to deliver what one imagined would happen. At 3rdPP, established within most but not all contemporary adults, one gains the abstract and critical faculties to more deeply understand the interior self, and

learns to monitor and regulate thought and belief (interiors) to coordinate with concrete reality (exteriors). Recall that our model of development stipulates that one shifts between the earliest developmental levels and one's highest capacity depending on the context, and clearly even highly developed adults will engage in projection, wishful thinking, etc. from time to time.

But a dilemma arises at 3rdPP where, as narrated above, there can be an entanglement of the strengths and weaknesses of 3rdPP reason. At 3rdPP one has gained the intellectual capacity to understand various types of bias and distortion produced by the mind (which is why the scientific method is valued), but has not yet mastered the skill of noticing these biases within *one's own* thinking – especially in the moment. Meanwhile, 3rdPP achieves a degree of mastery within the realm of abstractions, formal reasoning, and imagination. Thus it can build magnificent, sublime, and elaborate thought-structures (theories, models, etc.). As the reader has no doubt noticed, one becomes quite attached to these creations of the intellect, which can be powerful forces of both good and harm.

Thus, at 3rdPP there can be a confusion between ideas and reality that is more subtle than that found at earlier levels. One falls prey to a "misplaced concreteness" in thinking that one's abstract ideas and ideals, such as beauty, symmetry, equality, democracy, or responsibility, exist as actual things in the world, rather than as ideas we have constructed to understand and manipulate the world. This is a subtler, though also more pernicious, form of projection. It is at the 4thPP action logic that one begins to become aware of these subtler projections, and also begins to understand the interpenetrative nature of how interiors and exteriors co-influence each other.

Roy Bhaskar coined the term "demi-reality" for ideas that don't map to reality – i.e. for the gap between ideas and the real. To bring the discussion back to the historical/cultural, *if* conditions are supportive, humanity as a whole (or specific societies) can progress along the developmental trajectory we have outlined – developing skills to reduce demi-reality. It is neither a monotonic nor a guaranteed movement, but cultures, like individuals, can become wiser as they develop new concepts, tools, and modes of reasoning and communicating. Ideally, our understanding of exterior "reality" increases alongside increasing depth in self-knowledge, which includes a more sophisticated understanding of how "ideas" work. A crucial aspect of this journey is an increasingly nuanced and clear appreciation of the *relationships between reality and ideas*. Or more broadly it is a journey of learning of the ways that the mind/body adds demi-reality to all that it perceives and conceives. This includes an actionable understanding of the unconscious.

The point is both simple to understand and profoundly difficult to fix: we take our ideas, our theories, our identities, and our ideologies too seriously, assigning too much certainty and reality to them. Here are examples of what this means. When one treats a person as a member of an abstract category (e.g. a Frenchman, a Democrat, a Virgo, or an INTJ) rather than an individual, then one may be confusing a (simple) idea for a (complex) reality. When technologists or policy-makers initiate large changes in society based on abstract theories without sufficiently considering on-the-ground realities, they are misunderstanding the relationship between ideas and the real. When people pay attention to pundits, prognosticators, and charlatans who, with a little more thought, would be seen as quite unlikely to correctly predict the future, they are caught in a fantasy of confusing ideas for realities. Each of the themes in the above discussion of "belief fallibilities"

points to a sense in which humanity has learned that ideas and ideals don't match reality as was once thought – i.e. each uncovers another facet of demi-reality.

Here we propose that skills developed at 4thPP allow one to better understand and coordinate the gap between ideas and the real. The entire developmental journey, of either an individual or a culture, can be framed in terms of this journey of more deep and nuanced apperception of how the What-Is of the cosmos relates to the *appearance* of the What-Is in the embodied mind of the human.

In the next chapter we delve deeper into the *philosophical* question of "what is real?" and in the succeeding chapter we explore the nature of thought and ideas more deeply from a *psychological* perspective. We will also get more specific about the ways that reality exhibits properties that differ from the structure of ideas (as concepts).

Deeper Dive: Stories of Recapitulation

The developmental and evolutionary journey of increasing levels of complexity and depth "recapitulates" itself at different levels of analysis, suggesting a kind of fractal or holographic principle at work. At the turn of the 19th century biologists proposed "embryological parallelism," the theory that "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny" – i.e. that the development of the embryo and fetus during gestation goes through stages resembling evolutionary phases back to the animal's remote ancestors.

Psychological scientists, including Jean Piaget, proposed that the development of cognitive capacities has parallels to growth in complexity found in the evolution of animals. Social theorists have observed that the evolution of meaning-making complexity through cultures at anthropological timescales has parallels to the development of cognitive complexity in individuals from childhood into adulthood.

Neuroscientists note how the human brain has a layered structure with mammalian-like regions at mid levels and reptilian-like regions beneath those. Finally, some of the most recent theories in cognitive science are suggesting that thought and brain activity itself operate through overlapping waves of signals that start at the lowest levels of complexity in the unconscious and progress through the developmental layers, recapitulating the developmental path of the individual – i.e. each thought that one has emerges from the depths of the unconscious through layers from magical through mythical and finally rational (or meta-rational) modes of cognition (Brown, 2002).

All of the above patterns of recapitulation cannot be taken too literally (the early embryo does not look *exactly* like a fish; archaic man did not think *exactly* like a 6 year old child), but there are remarkable unavoidable parallels in structures at these varying scales of time and space (evolutionary, anthropological, personal, and moment-to-moment cognition). The similarities in structure can be partially explained by stripping off surface features and focusing on the development of structural complexity. The action logics (1stPP, 2ndPP, 3rdPP, etc.) can be used to describe structural changes in culture and cognition (and more refined complexity models have been developed; e.g. see Common's model of Hierarchical Complexity, 2008; and Fisher's Skill Theory, 1980).

A Philosopher's Knot – Knowing and Being Entangled

Is there a God? – Philosophers as Under-laborers

Is there a God? – A Soul or Spirit? – A Purpose to life? – A life after death? – An Ultimate Reality? What is Consciousness? Is there a cosmic force of Eros? Do we have free will?

Definitive answers to these "questions of ultimate concern" are beyond the purview of scientific knowledge and the scientific method – at least for the time being (despite some fervent attempts to apply scientific ideas to metaphysical questions). They are metaphysical questions. Metaphysics is largely about the "ontological" inquiry into what can be considered *Real*, as opposed to merely epiphenomenal/derivative, imaginary/fictitious, subjective/illusory, or fallacious/groundless. [4] Though various specific claims can be made about the objects of consideration (God, Consciousness, Eros etc.), the fundamental issue is whether they *exist* at all, i.e. whether they are serious topics of inquiry. Differences about what is considered real or to exist are often at the core of disagreements about the *truth* of claims.

Though Philip K. Dick makes the tidy suggestion that "Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away" (1985, p. 4), the question remains controversial – so in this chapter we take a deeper dive in to the metaphysical question: "*What is real*?" A *post*-metaphysical approach should not lead us to say that "nothing is really real," nor to *any* definitive answer, nor to discard the question as meaningless; but rather to answer the question sincerely in a way that also witnesses how and why we are asking it in the first place.

In the chapter above on magical, mythical, and mystical thinking, we framed metaphysics and post-metaphysics in *developmental* terms, exploring how spiritual ideas can contain multiple layers of interpretation, each embodying an action logic defining its structural complexity and wisdom-depth. In the second chapter we situated post-metaphysical thinking within a broader perspective by narrating three *historical/cultural* arcs. This had implications for where spiritual thinking might be heading. In this chapter we will explore a more explicitly *philosophical* approach to post-metaphysics, tapping into what contemporary scholars are teaching us about the question "What is real?" – which is the central question in metaphysics, and thus in post-metaphysics.

As noted, philosophical thought has undergone a gradual developmental transformation over millennia. Philosophers and sages were once unabashed about making broad claims about man, nature, and the cosmos, but now, with the fallibilities of human reason having been increasingly exposed, they must be more humble and self-reflexive in their theorizing. To satisfy contemporary norms philosophers must imply a knowing that they, inescapably, come from a particular perspective. Their ideas must aim for usefulness rather than ultimate truth. In fact the role of philosophy has been recast by some (including Roy Bhaskar and Jürgen Habermas) into that of an "*under-laborer*" that helps other disciplines do their job, rather than as a master architect, curator, or arbitrator that sets other disciplines in their proper place.

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[4] Metaphysics originally meant the body of Aristotle's work *after* his Physics, but later took on its current meaning of the science of things transcending the physical or natural.

The role of under-laborer is humble, but far from inconsequential – it is as important as the foundation is to a home. Philosophers are experts at teasing apart assumptions, noticing hidden contradictions, inspecting the strength of foundations, finding connections among disparate fields, and inspecting, not just the products, but the processes used to arrive at them. Philosophy holds the banner at the vanguard of post-metaphysical thinking, by, for example, illustrating how concepts and symbolic language, the building blocks of ideas and theories, are frustratingly mutable.

All domains of human knowledge can be strengthened and tuned up by a critical philosophical look "under the hood," and most scholarly disputes can be improved by a philosophical meta-analysis of the properties of the dialogue itself. (Philosophy is increasingly trans-disciplinary, incorporating ideas from psychology, sociology, linguistics, computational science, systems theory, etc. – even as it informs these other disciplines.)

So, in the end contemporary philosophy is less likely to answer the questions above ("Is there a God?" etc.) than it is to provide Rules of the Road for engaging in the inquiry. But this is crucial since, in our time the *way* that we inquire and dialogue about "questions of ultimate concern" may be more critical than the conclusions we come to, as those answers may need to evolve rapidly with the rest of human reality. In addition, philosophical analysis can show us that metaphysical assumptions and metaphysical thinking are inevitable aspects of meaning making, and that we can both *choose* and *act out* our metaphysics more consciously.

Bhaskar and Habermas also see the role of contemporary philosophy as primarily *emancipatory*. That is, rather than discovering exalted or fundamental metaphysical truths, contemporary philosophy has a primarily ethical or healing role that operates on whole systems of thought in the way that psychotherapy operates on the individual. Emancipation is very much about reducing what Bhaskar calls the *demi-real* (beliefs and conceptions that do not correspond well with reality). Others might call it ignorance, inconsistency, misinformation, denial, or bullshit – which are ultimately seen as suffering-creating chains that we might free ourselves from. The demi-real involves not just erroneous ideas, but erroneous *certainty* in ideas.

Philosophy takes a – usually critical but also possibly appreciative – stance to shine a light on inconsistencies, paradoxes, blind spots, hypocrisies, etc. (Psychological "shadow work" can reveal dark material but also "golden shadows" – positive things about ourselves that are somehow painful to acknowledge.) A number of 20th century philosophical schools adopted a "critical" perspective (e.g. "Critical Theory") that questioned and deconstructed social norms, institutions, ideologies, and dominant narratives. At best these theories sketched a collective path toward liberation from social oppressions, and at worst they cynically dwelled on what was wrong with society, without offering practical solutions or hope. But these frameworks can also be used *self-reflectively* to critique a theorist's, group's, or discipline's *own* stance. Critical self-reflection upon *my/our* demi-reality is thus *self-emancipatory* (and part of what Bhaskar calls the "pulse of freedom" within humanity). The principles we are exploring in this text are meant to be applied in this self-reflective way, as a form of self-learning and self-emancipation. Thus, the under-laboring of post-metaphysical philosophical thought can be deeply *spiritual* in its intention and application, aiming to further human happiness, flourishing, freedom, and/or evolution.

Two Truths: One Problem

Metaphysical realms. Speaking of using philosophical thought to free ourselves from outmoded ideas – let's take the risk of beginning by taking on one of the broadest and most strongly held ideologies in contemporary spiritual thought – that being that there is a metaphysical realm or world that holds truths outside of mind, matter, time, and space. We find this type of argument in many forms, including philosophy (e.g. Platonic Ideals), occult belief systems (e.g. etheric or spirit worlds), and contemporary spirituality (e.g. separating Absolute from Relative realities). Our intention is not to rebuke and debunk such beliefs, but to propose a post-metaphysical framework – a more reflective (meta-) metaphysics – that can appreciate what drives such belief systems yet avoids problematic modes of reason.

One of the problems with (classical) metaphysical thinking is that it posits a realm that is neither objective – as existing in time and space, nor subjective – as part of human experience. Metaphysical claims, whether made by an esteemed philosopher or by your cousin the plumber smoking weed, are particularly problematic because of this. Modern thought has developed a rather clear and useful differentiation between the objective and subjective worlds, and concluded that claims about each must be made under different rules. Subjectivity is explored through methods including phenomenology (trained introspection) and self-reporting that allow for the validity of personal and aesthetic judgment. Objective truths are determined using variations on the scientific paradigm that combines empiricism, logical methods, replicability, and collective inquiry. (Other disciplinary methods have been tuned to study the *intersubjective* world of beliefs and relationships held between and among individuals and groups.)

Though contemporary philosophy has articulated the inter-relationships and interpenetrations of objectivity and subjectivity (e.g. between facts and values), there is still no room for classically metaphysical objects that exist in an ideal world that is neither objective nor subjective (nor intersubjective). Russell describes metaphysical as being an "uncreated, indestructible, unchanging, indivisible" realm beyond time and space, beyond matter and energy. Given that, on what basis can one make a metaphysical claim? How could one ever test such a claim when it refers to something beyond both matter and mind, beyond measurement and thought? Objects in the actual physical world are assumed to obey certain laws; and subjective reality is understood to develop within its own logic and rules – but there is nothing to constrain the metaphysical world. Literally anything is possible there because nothing is impossible – anything that can be imagined can be comfortably placed there and said to "exist."

In scholarly circles, and to a lesser degree in cultural narratives, metaphysical claims are expected to hold to the principles of logical thought, yet they are not further constrained to be consistent with objective or subjective realities. Hypothetical thinking is similarly unconstrained, but does not posit a new domain of existence (hypotheticals are subjective imaginations). This is what Aruirre meant by metaphysics being "the doctrine of ideas that equates being with thought" – ideas and the real are equated, and thus undifferentiated. The metaphysical object or realm is neither here nor there – like the view from nowhere by no one, it crumbles under the post-metaphysical gaze.

One of the problems with classical metaphysical thought, including how it is used in spirituality, is that it is a convenient tool for precluding critical discussion. If one witnesses an unexplained phenomena, or proposes an indefensible idea, proposing that it exists or emanates from some other dimension or alternate reality may produce the *impression* that something has been explained, when in fact it was only a dodge – producing a grimy gem of demi-reality from the magician's hat.

In a prior chapter we showed how sophisticated metaphysical thinking incorporated the abstract (and to some extent the logical) capacities of 3rdPP cognition, while eschewing the scientific (and some of the critical) thinking elements of 3rdPP cognition. A "fully" 3rdPP approach, one that can hang together through contemporary post-modern analysis, must answer to the critical and empirical questions of the scientific method, which metaphysical realms cannot live up to.

Therefore, though one can't avoid having metaphysical assumptions about what is assumed to exist when one considers any question, one can and should avoid positing a metaphysical *place or realm* within which to locate objects of thought or reality. But doing so may prove to be difficult in practice for some, because many traditional spiritual and philosophical frameworks rely on just such a realm. These frameworks, and the teachers who promote them, use sophisticated reasoning to create self-consistent belief systems that satisfy "questions of ultimate concern" for many individuals. So they are difficult to relinquish.

Two truths. Returning to the metaphysical spiritual claims listed in Exhibit A, which we have said are made by highly intelligent and insightful individuals who understand both modern rationality and the post-modern critique of rationality – on what basis can these claims about Ultimate Reality be made? As we have said, claims from this common "play book" follow motifs established millennia ago when the Wisdom Traditions were formed. They have been transferred to modern Western cultures hungry for spiritual meaning-making in the wake of modernity's dry materialistic and rational worldview. The motif common to them all is the "*Two Truths" doctrine*.

Before going further let's reiterate some developmental considerations about belief in metaphysical realities. 1stPP does not clearly differentiate interiors from exteriors, so there is only one "realm" of experience. Metaphysical beliefs at 2ndPP are of the supernatural or occult variety, in which the realm or "dimension" of non-ordinary phenomena is quasi-concrete, operating over or alongside conventional reality (both objective and subjective), with some interactions between them. Like dreams and novels, these "alternate reality" realms have objects, causality, and space-like and time-like properties (e.g. Heaven, Akashic Records, subtle or spirit-realms, etc.). These realms are, in a sense, abstractions of empirical realities.

The "higher" forms of metaphysical thinking referred to in Exhibit A are extremely abstract, positing universals above/encompassing, or fundamental essences below/within, the entirety of experiential reality – and yet existing beyond any experience. When we discuss metaphysical thinking below we usually refer to this later type, which we could call "classical" metaphysical thinking, which refers to an Absolute realm beyond any semblance of space, time, mind, and causality. It is this metaphysics that is critiqued in gestures toward post-metaphysical thinking (e.g. Russell and Habermas above).

It is not necessarily fallacious, meaningless, or groundless to posit metaphysical entities, realms, or truths. But such claims should be understood to operate within certain action logics and discourse norms. They are valid as meaning-generative claims if understood to operate below 3rdPP scientific rationality. They can be productively or enjoyably entertained at 4thPP and beyond, but with the understanding that one is accessing one's 1stPP and/or 2ndPP consciousness.

Absolute and Relative Truth. The Two Truths doctrine held by the sages from Exhibit A states that there is a "relative" reality, governed by relative truths, that stands in contrast to an "Absolute" (or Ultimate) Reality, governed by Absolute (or Ultimate) Truths. (As the reader will anticipate that I will argue that this distinction has reached its limit of usefulness, I will henceforth drop the capital letters.)

The two truths doctrine was invented at a time when sages had weak and nebulous conceptual tools for differentiating the objective and subjective realms (not to mention the intersubjective realm). They may have formed personal intuitions with significantly more clarity, but the cultures they were immersed in did not provide the language resources for the clear conceptual self-understanding nor communication of such intuitions. (Note: take care not to confuse the undifferentiated or poorly differentiated with the *integrated* or interpenetrative understanding of ideas that can only come *after* they are first differentiated – this confusion is an example of what Wilber calls the "pre-trans fallacy".) Many of the thinkers of antiquity had not fully grappled with the fallibilities of reason that we have discussed – some of which were not clearly articulated until the mid-twentieth century. (This is a hypothesis whose validity does not impact us much – it is quite possible that some ancient civilizations surpassed Western culture developmentally.)

The metaphysical realm is said to offer a home for unfathomable paradoxes. That "I am nothing" and that "I am everything" can both be true in the realm of the Absolute. Spiritual revelations such as these (and "the world is an illusion" and "everything is perfect as it is") should be taken as sometimes-useful perspectives on reality – *tools* as the pragmatists would say. To interpret them literally or at face value is clearly a dangerous thing for an individual or a culture to do. The two truths doctrine was in part a kind of epistemological truce formed from the incommensurability of paradoxical ideas about the fundamental nature of reality. Absolute reality is claimed to be non-dual, or beyond categories, yet the *two*-truths idea itself contains a dualism.

Of course, since metaphysical thinking is not subject to the conventions of reason, such paradoxes are not a problem for it – rather, paradoxes may be used to prove the necessity, and thus the existence, of metaphysical realms. But this type of circular logic, perhaps necessary for the 3rdPP mind to address questions of ultimate concern, can be seen as bankrupt when more contemporary 4thPP modes of reason are available. Such paradoxes, as will be explained later, can be explained as products of the way that the mind relies on language and categories, rather than as existing ontologically in an alternate or Absolute reality.

Spiritual adepts will sometimes claim that their approach reveals "reality *as it is*," in its true form. It is reasonable to assume that mystical or contemplative insights reveal that everyday reality is a constructed experience, and that even time, space, independent objects, and the self are insubstantial. Such insights can leave one with a depth of understanding that makes the prior world-view seem like a dream or an illusion. But to be ever clearer in the negative knowledge of what is

not true does not ultimately lead to a positive understanding of the world "as it really is" (but only "as it really *is not*").

As discussed previously, mystical experience is often associated with a *feeling* of boundless clarity, wisdom, confidence, and yes, "truthiness." The biblical message from God: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End," echoed also in many corners of Eastern spiritualism, lights up the mind like a luminous full moon or a blazing sun. One can have a spiritual *experience* of reality as a totality, or what *feels* like totality, that seems expressible only with language such as we see in Exhibit A. But from our contemporary 4thPP vantage point, we see that this is not a direct view into objective reality. Mystical experiences are "ineffable" and portend truths or insights "beyond language" – but this does not mean that those truths or insights are valid. In fact, all experience and intuition is fundamentally ineffable, as has been noted. Rather, such experiences, in addition to supporting deep meaning and emancipation from suffering, can indicate important facts about how the *human mind* works, and the relationship between the realm of the real and the realm of ideas. Mystical experiences can be the result of stripping the mind bare of its normal processing modalities, and can thus reveal much about how those modalities function.

The realm of the Absolute, toward which descriptors such as infinite, ultimate, boundless, omnipresent, etc. point, is empty as a realm of metaphysical "reality." However, such terms can usefully be used to point *toward* some horizon or limit. Infinity is a useful concept – for example it is indispensible to mathematicians. The process of opening one's awareness, or one's compassion, to ever greater extents can be described in terms of an ultimate end point, even if that extreme is unreachable, receding as one approaches it. The same can be said of the elimination or emptiness of anything.

Emptiness. The concept of "emptiness" is also prominent in spiritual discourse, particularly in Buddhist-inspired metaphysics. We can distinguish three ways to approach the idea of spiritual emptiness: experientially, logically, and metaphysically – with the last option being problematic. Experientially (i.e. phenomenologically) it is true that individuals have contemplative or spiritual states that, though ineffable, seem best described by the concept of emptiness. Logically (i.e. epistemologically or through rational deconstruction) one can also argue that all of the objects of experience are constructed and that their "true nature" is empty of the properties that we attribute to them. One can also argue logically that objects seen as independent entities actually exist only in relationship to other entities, and thus their appearance as objects is an empty illusion.

These logical conclusions (found, for example, in the Buddhist teachings of Nāgārjuna) can be developed into understandings so deep that one *perceives* reality with the immediate realization that they are true – i.e. that the objects of experience, and experience itself, is empty of all perceptual appearances and conceptual attributes – thus uniting the experiential and logical modes of thought described above (what Russell would call the highest achievement of the mind). Also, as noted above, emptiness can stand for the logical/theoretical endpoint of any process of diminishment.

But none of these modes of thought – experiential, logical, or their union – authorize one to claim that emptiness is an ultimate property of objects or of reality. Emptiness as a spiritual concept is extremely abstract – in fact it sits at the end of the abstraction continuum, as something with all

properties abstracted away into formlessness. In this sense it is analogous to the concepts of universal spirit and the ground of being, which are abstracted to a level of complete *fullness*, containing all things and properties. Ultimate reality is said to paradoxically be both completely empty and completely full. But it is a mistake of projection to interpret the contemplative *experiences* associated with emptiness and fullness as *proving* that there is an ultimate reality that is radically empty and full. That a single experience invokes the ideals of radical emptiness and radical fullness speaks more to the paucity of our conceptual apparatus than to the nature of reality. Using these concepts as tools or lenses, one can *adopt the perspective* that reality (or any object, thought, or phenomena, including the self) is radically empty, *or* is radically full, *or* is both (or is neither! – to borrow a trope from the "tetralemma" of the Indian sage Nāgārjuna). (We return to the concept of emptiness and Absolutes in the next chapter, where we consider their status as an objects or properties; and again in the section on Phenomenology, where we explore the associated experiences in more depth.)

The Two Truths Doctrine is an outmoded classical metaphysics. It remains meaning-generative for a 2ndPP action logic that accepts majestic esoteric truths handed down from authorities; and for a 3thPP action logic that can't resolve the paradoxes of belief fallibility without creating a world outside of both thought and concrete reality. The downsides of using a pre-rational or hyper-abstract metaphysics were described above. The issue is not that Mystics describing an Absolute Reality (or emptiness) are themselves *pointing toward* a demi-reality, but that the gestures are so easily misinterpreted or reified. Framing the absolutes as horizons or goal-states, rather than metaphysical realms or ends, might avoid such problems. As the meaning-making resources of 4thPP become increasingly available to us, we can adopt a metaphysics that focuses on "real" human suffering, human potential, and the delicate interdependencies among humans, and between humans and nature – while still acknowledging the enchanting, the paradoxical, and the radically empty realms of *experience* (not "reality"). In the end, wise teachers and sages, including those quoted in Exhibit A, ground and measure the spiritual journey in terms of the ethics of concrete daily life.

Arguing against the venerable Two Truths Doctrine is pretty heavy lifting, especially for one such as myself who would not claim any sort of spiritual "enlightenment." But its demise is a straightforward implication of post-metaphysical thinking in its fullness. Unwrapping the full potential of post-metaphysical thinking, including its unsettling conclusions for contemporary spiritual belief systems, is a formidable task. That is why I approach it through numerous trajectories in this text. In fact, post-metaphysical thinking challenges many of the conclusions of classical philosophy as well. Luckily, scholars including Habermas, Russell, Lakoff, Bhaskar, and Wilber have done the bulk of the groundwork that I will build upon. Next we will walk through the classical philosophical territories of ontology, epistemology, metaphysics, and phenomenology, to chart yet another path into the post-metaphysical perspective.

Truth, Belief, Vulnerability, and Seriousness

Tensions between ontology and epistemology. Central to the topics of spirituality and religion is an inquiry into the nature of *belief*. Little could be more important in life than *knowing* what is true – including *feeling* confident in one's beliefs and *convincing* others that one's beliefs are valid. Determining what to believe, who is right and wrong, how uncertain one should be, and when one

needs more information, are essential preoccupations for people. Believing, advocating, doubting, and inquiring are central to spiritual life as well.

Disconcertingly, we find ourselves immersed in a world of increasing change, uncertainty, conflicting perspectives, and misinformation. On a daily basis one must decide not only what to believe, but how much *effort* to invest in seeking or confirming new facts and ideas. As mentioned above, most of what we believe relies on 1stPP and 2ndPP action logics including gut feelings, authoritative sources, or social norms; yet increasingly we need to use 3rdPP and higher action logics to navigate reality. Our modern understanding of civic duty compels us to be informed about science and technology, but it is less recognized that the average person is increasingly motivated to be a *lay philosopher*, thinking more deeply and more abstractly to make sense of the world.

In fact, in our "post-truth" society the average person is faced with deep philosophical conundrums about the very nature of knowledge, truth, and reality in simply trying to interpret the daily news. We confuse pre-rational with post/trans-rational approaches to the complexity of reality. In addition, as modern citizens and consumers we are constantly being manipulated by experts in the science of how the mind works, through advisements and propaganda. More than ever, it is our civic duty to know enough about our own minds to be able to act autonomously within this torrent of skillful manipulation of our psyches. So we are increasingly called to be proto-cognitive-scientists as well as proto-philosophers. Luckily we live at a time when these two disciplines are increasingly overlapping and accessible. In this chapter we discuss philosophy, with its epistemological nods toward psychology, and in the next chapter we focus in on findings in cognitive psychology that have deep implications for philosophy. So, gentle reader, bear with me as I introduce some philosophical terminology.

Philosophy differentiates *epistemology*, the study of the nature of knowledge, from *ontology*, the study of the nature of reality (or Being). Epistemology is about "what can be known," and ontology is about "what is real." These two are intimately linked, because what we believe to be true about reality is constrained by the (epistemological) limitations of knowing and thinking; and the nature and limitations of knowledge are determined in large part by the (ontological or real) constraints exerted by things like neurobiology, genetics, and culture that restrict the scope of human cognition.

Ontology is closely related to metaphysics and according to most definitions is a sub-field of metaphysics. Ontology inquires into the *objects* or entities that are fundamental to reality (or to some domain of inquiry), while metaphysics inquires more broadly into the *nature* of reality, i.e. it identifies the objects and also includes narratives or frameworks describing the roles, relationships, and ultimate purposes of those objects. As we said above, what one believes is *real* is a subset, or underpinning, of what one believes is *true*, as truth-claims describe *things*.

However, there is some gray area here, because to claim that an object is real entails defining or suggesting its key properties (e.g. ancient scholars defined man as "the animal that has rationality" [or politics or language]). The key properties of a fundamental entity often include its relationship with other fundamental entities, especially via core *ontological relationships*, for example: What creates, causes, or governs what? What lives within, contains, is an essential element of, needs, or feeds upon what? What opposes, diminishes, or destroys what? What is

identical to what? For example, is the mind (or consciousness) a *part* of nature, having been produced by natural evolution? – or is Mind (or Consciousness) the *foundation* and essential ground underpinning all of nature and the cosmos? Thus, the "what is real" of ontology bleeds into the narrative story-telling aspect of metaphysics.

Spirituality and religion are primarily concerned with ontological/metaphysical questions, but as we have indicated, in the contemporary context ontological inquiries must be tempered with epistemological considerations – i.e. a deep engagement with the disquieting limits of knowing. How does one come to understand divine spirit, absolute reality, or universal love? The epistemological answer given by Socrates is: "know thyself." From a 4thPP one could add that knowing thyself is not a singular enterprise, but a participatory and dialogical one.

After Kant philosophy became increasingly self-conscious about strong ontological (and metaphysical) claims, faced with the revelations outlined above in the "Brief History of Belief Fallibility." Epistemology was "in," and ontology was suspect. Making claims about reality was relegated to scientists, who seemed better equipped. However, a counter-movement developed (as is often the case in thought-trends) to reclaim ontology, and the post-metaphysical turn is in part the result of a new integration of ontology and epistemology. (In a later section we discuss phenomenology, another significant category of philosophical thought.)

This reintegration of ontology was bolstered by the insight that *all* theories are underpinned by, usually tacit, ontological assumptions. For instance Bhaskar argued that the scientific method itself would be impossible if reality was not *actual* (real), *differentiated* (containing parts), *structured* (the parts have relationships), *changing* (dynamic), and *intelligible* (can be at least partly known by humans). One tacitly makes these ontological assumptions when one does science. These may seem like thin or obvious assumptions, but Bhaskar was making the point that ontological assumptions are deep, omnipresent, and unavoidable. Even "objective" science cannot escape metaphysical thinking and ontological assumptions.

Post-metaphysics seeks a balance between ontology and epistemology, yet some philosophers travelled far enough down the nihilistic branch of the epistemological path to claim that it is impossible to prove that reality exists at all (or to prove that experience is not merely a dream, or a subjective interpretation, or a simulation). These scholars have been criticized for lacking "seriousness" (Bhaskar et al, 2009). To say that reality does not exist is to commit a "performative contradiction" – that is, one's actions belie a more deeply held belief that is at odds with one's words. Similarly it was pointed out that to claim that "there is no ultimate truth" was itself a statement of ultimate truth – catching radical postmodern thinkers in a performative contradiction. In focusing on epistemology alone we risk losing sight of the pragmatic and ethical "realities" of life – becoming lost in a disembodied intellectual world, and avoiding life's existential urgencies. And yet epistemological concerns (e.g. "how can we know it is true?") are an essential ingredient in balancing overconfidence, dogmatism, and bias in ontological claims about what is real.

A century before Bhaskar, Habermas, and Wilber, the stage for post-metaphysical philosophy was set by the American Pragmatist scholars (including William James, Charles Sanders Peirce, and John Dewey). Louis Menand, says that Pragmatism is an idea about ideas: "The idea is that ideas – theories, beliefs, convictions, principles, concepts, hypotheses – are essentially means of

adaptation…Ideas are not 'out there' waiting to be discovered, but are tools that people devise" (Menand, 2001, p. 1, 8). This notion is central to post-metaphysical thinking.

Integrating ontology and epistemology. Post-metaphysics can be seen as an integration, or perhaps an uneasy truce, between ontology and epistemology. This integration can be summarized in four steps. First, from an *ontological* perspective, we always already assume that *reality exists*, and that we exist. As above, to assume otherwise involves performative contradictions. (There are other ontological assumptions that, whether we intellectually/theoretically agree with them, are shown to be held tacitly through our actions.)

Second, from an *epistemological* perspective, any claim that we put forth (including the first one above), is fallible in all of the ways we have mentioned in this text. These two together seem to leave us bound in a contradiction, but it is better to see them each as partial truths that interact with each other dialectically, creating a tension that begets a higher level integration.

The third step integrates the first two to produce the pragmatic principle that we should be, and often find ourselves, searching for ever *more* truthful knowledge, i.e. for knowledge that best approximates reality. This is akin to Freud's "reality principle," and is simply a necessary condition for survival and negotiating reality "seriously."

Fourth and last, we can see the validity of truth claims as *graded*, i.e., although no truth claim is absolute or permanent, this does not imply the relativistic conclusion that all claims are equally valid or equally meaningless – we can compare alternative claims and can (often) judge one to be a closer fit to reality, or generally more valid and perspicuous, than another. This represents a move from the 2ndPP attitude that beliefs are either true or false, to the 3rdPP stance that finding truth is an ongoing process, always open to revision and critique.

At 4thPP and above, the iterative search for truth becomes increasingly nuanced as additional sources of fallibility are realized; including a realization of how values and ethical concerns are deeply involved in the search for truth. Development is about complexity and depth – epistemological humility follows from cognitive complexity, while ontological grounding becomes more profound with developmental depth. Paradoxically, an increasing weight of "seriousness" can be accompanied by greater lightness of being.

Definitions of post-metaphysics. We have said that post-metaphysics is in part about a stance of informed humility that admits to the indeterminacy of knowledge, and have also described it in general terms as a resolution and integration of the philosophical schools of epistemology vs. ontology. We have also given examples of what this new humility implies, through a developmental framework describing magical, mythical, and metaphysical thinking. But we have not yet tried to *define post-metaphysics* itself. So let's dive a bit further into exactly what philosophers mean by post-metaphysics. Of course, since all concepts carry some indeterminacy, there is no single definition of the term, but rather a rich field of overlapping interpretations that one can develop a "gist" for.

In *Integral Spirituality* Ken Wilber (2006, p. 231) explains post-metaphysics by saying that "[arguably] metaphysics…ended with Kant [who realized that] we do not perceive empirical

objects in a completely realistic, pre-given fashion; but rather, structures of the knowing subject import various characteristics to the known object…Metaphysics is then a broad name for the type of thinking that can't figure [out that] reality is not a perception, but a conception. [...It is] thinking that falls prey to the myth of the given."

Wilber's colleague Sean Esbjörn-Hargens adds that post-metaphysics implies a *participatory* and thus *multi-perspectival* approach to truth which "avoids positing realities independent of the viewer," and instead locates realities as "perspectives from somewhere by someone" (Esbjörn-Hargens & Zimmerman, 2009, p. 484).

Post-metaphysics points not so much to a set of beliefs as a set of principles and cautions for *how* we can think, communicate, argue, and build knowledge. Cooke (1994) summarizes Habermas' notion of the historical trend into post-metaphysical thinking as including the following:

– Understanding rational discourse as being less about what people think as about *how* people think (i.e. the focus shifts from valid conclusions to valid process);
– Replacing "foundationalism with *fallibilism*" in the approach of truth-finding – all truth claims are tentative and open to critique and revision;
– Casting doubt on whether reason can be purely objective, as in the abstract "view from nowhere" that is free of historical, psychological, and cultural conditioning; i.e. truths and knowledge are *context*-bound;
– Understanding that because no perspective is privileged above all others, knowledge progresses through actual dialogic *encounters* – the confrontation of ideas combined with efforts toward mutual understanding (and not through an intellectual imagination of what others would think);
– Framing philosophy in a fundamentally ethical, *emancipatory*, applied, and under-laboring role – renouncing its traditional fixation on discovering abstract theoretical truths;
– Recognizing the deep interplay of the traditional truth-seeking mode of philosophical discourse with the aesthetic/expressive and moral/practical functions of discourse (or Reason); i.e., highlighting the importance of attitudes like *sincerity, authenticity, and care* in philosophical thought.

Cooke's summary focuses on epistemological principles, so we should add that, as described above, post-metaphysics allows for a deeply pragmatist and ontological orientation that takes reality seriously.

But not *too* seriously. The post-metaphysical attitude allows for and calls for humility, playfulness, openness, curiosity, awe, surprise, and an acknowledgement of existential vulnerability.

Seriousness, playfulness, and vulnerability. This humility comes not from a selfless modesty, though that can accompany it, but it is forced upon one when one acknowledges and opens to the accumulated sources of fallibility of human reasoning and sense-making. It comes from the vulnerable and even ironic position of having to coordinate two contradictory insights: the

epistemological insight into the indeterminacy of every claim and belief; and the ontological insight that one must often act decisively, *as if* one knows.

It is within this caldron of dissonance that the 3rdPP ego, the assured autonomous sense of a self-in-control, can be transformed into a more fluid state that can flow amidst chaotic upheavals – a movement that can occur on personal as well as cultural levels (as 4thPP and above consciousness). Overcoming the attendant dissonance and vulnerability calls for reaching into deeper layers of trust and regard of self and others. It includes developing a meta-cognitive instinct about when to let go, open up, listen, or let be, vs. when to let rip, commit, coerce, or command. This is why post-metaphysics (and a 4thPP worldview) requires a deeper sense of both ethics and spirituality in comparison to the scientific, logical and/or materialistic 3rdPP worldview.

This vulnerability is an *interpersonal* as well as personal phenomenon. Beginning at 4thPP (and even more at 5thPP) we more deeply experience how the sense of self is defined by and negotiated within social relationships. The ego/self is defined as much by how others judge us (or might judge us), and by what we try not to be (i.e. those whom we condemn), as by a personal process of self-authorship. As we have discussed, meaning-making and belief-formation are deeply intersubjective processes, such that the fallibilities of reason and of knowing are largely fallibilities in *collective* sense-making. And, as we depend on communicative processes and relationships of trust and solidarity to create meaning for ourselves, it is both the self-as-*autonomous*-system and the self-as-*interdependent*-with-others that is revealed as vulnerable. We have mentioned the ideas of Hans Kögler (1992) and Peter Elbow (2009), who emphasize the important of the, sometimes unsettling, authentic hermeneutic encounter with the other as a means to expose beliefs or values previously hidden in one's shadow, and thus add to one's own self-understanding. Kögler says: not rational analysis but *the other* "becomes the point of departure for critical insight into self" (p. 272).

Since the vulnerability is mutual and reciprocal, its resolution must include mutual inquiry and reciprocal regard. It also requires shared ontological commitments or *beliefs* – all of which implicate new forms of "spirituality" and ethics. But the conundrum is in knowing at what level and to what degree this shared meaning is required. Sovereignty and autonomy are in a dialectical dance with mutuality and solidarity – overreaching the former leads to isolation and defensiveness, while overreaching the latter leads to dogmatic group-think and oppressive social structures. Developmental theories tell us that the capacities necessary for locating an appropriate balance cannot emerge from brute intellectual effort coming from 3rdPP, but must come from a higher consciousness that can metabolize the apparent contradictions that come with the territory.

The inevitability of metaphysics. As we have said, post-metaphysical thinking is not non-metaphysical thinking, but is a reflective appreciation of the limits of metaphysical thinking. The fact is that in mundane life, in scientific pursuits, and in philosophical theorizing, one cannot avoid metaphysical assumptions – though they often remain implicit. As the precocious child will ultimately force its parent into a philosopher's role by repeatedly asking "but *why* is *that?"* following each deeper level of explanation, a scholar can, for any claim, drill down the causal or explanatory stack to reach an underlying assumption that must simply be assumed or believed, with no deeper explanation or evidence possible. This bottom is metaphysical.

In a recent paper in Integral Review journal, Zachary Stein says:

These three topics – sex, reality, and politics – are implicated in any metaphysical characterization of the human ... [Historically] humans have long depended upon the normative force of metaphysical ideas to regulate these realms in particular. Untold and innumerable injustices were perpetrated in these realms in the name of pre-modern metaphysics. Modernity sought to rectify these by turning to science alone [and rejecting metaphysics], yet as the centuries unfolded the vacuum created by the absence of metaphysics continued to expand, and today the absence of metaphysics is now creating new and more dangerous problems ... [Authoritarian] political thought is resurgent today because of the absence of reasonable discourse about metaphysical realities during a time when exactly these realties are being put in question ... The way we answer questions like, "What is the human?" [and "What is Love?"] will determine the next century ... Metaphysics is necessary because we are in a time between worlds. (Stein, 2018, pp. 191-93)

Though we problematize metaphysical claims about absolute reality, consciousness, and spirit, our critique is of "classical" metaphysics that traffics in absolutes. Stein reminds us that we can and must reflect upon and take responsibility for the metaphysical foundations of ordinary life and "questions of ultimate concern" related to *this* world. For example, though there are more and less sophisticated ways to understand them, the metaphysical or metaphorical "forces of good and evil" may forever be an element of moral deliberation.

Metaphysical thinking is thus unavoidable, but it can be approached skillfully and ethically, vs. bluntly and authoritatively. As indicated above, we can understand it as related to an always-operating level of consciousness, an action-logic at the magical level of consciousness, which higher levels of abstraction and complexity build upon. And we can, in a quasi-therapeutic sense, intentionally uncover, recover, or reconstruct elements of that lower level toward emancipatory and ethical ends.

It is useful to differentiate explicit from implicit metaphysics. *Explicit* metaphysical thinking, especially as in the grand narratives and totalities espoused by some philosophers and spiritual sages, is susceptible to the cautionary caveats, such as grandiosity, we have described. *Implicit* metaphysics hides beneath all thought and cannot be avoided. Self-emancipation involves a kind of individual or collective "shadow work" that reveals these implicit foundations. Though such revelation makes them explicit in a sense, they remain active at the implicit level of consciousness, unless intentionally altered. For example, one may discover, through a therapeutic process, that one fears mother figures; or that one has a deep love of oceans. Discovering these things does not imply that they have thus been uprooted or transformed. In the case of the former, one may want to pursue a deeper therapeutic program that uproots or re-programs the fear; or with the later case to cultivate that experience of love. As we will see in our exploration of George Lakoff's work on metaphors, there are culture-wide and species-wide phenomena involving implicit metaphysics.

Science fiction author Arthur C. Clark said that within each historical era "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." Similarly, some would say that metaphysics is just a name for what has not yet been explained by science. Applied to spirituality, this is the "God of the gaps" principle noted by skeptics: i.e. claiming that a phenomena

unexplained by current science must be an act of God, or explained through some supernatural process. This type of metaphysical thinking is clearly fallacious, since repeatedly science has been used to explain phenomena that were previously "explained" through esoteric metaphysics.

However, even though our 3rdPP capacities for scientific investigation have disclosed much about the atom, the galaxy, and even human nature, there are natural phenomena too subtle or complex, and questions of "ultimate concern" too deep, to be understood or even approached via 3rdPP reason. Humans will forever have intuitions and questions that are, though beyond empirical analysis, critically important to constructing a meaningful life. We cannot help but construct magical and mythical interpretations of and answers to these questions. Though ideally, we can understand our "answers" to such questions as provisional and constructed; and we can sustain the sense of re-enchantment and awe that should accompany inquiry into the unknowable.

In sum, not only is metaphysical thinking unavoidable because it sits at the foundations of any rationally organized thought, it is also unavoidable because some questions worth asking cannot be answered through rational or empirical analysis. Post-metaphysical thinking (1) includes an understanding of the unavoidability of *implicit* metaphysics, and (2) adopts an *explicit* metaphysics that acknowledges the fallibility of making such claims, while allowing for strong "ontological commitments" about reality that can be argued as pragmatically necessary. In the next chapter we explore some of these defensible ontological and metaphysical assumptions.

Contours of the Real

What is Really Real?

The flavors of reality. One can formulate many "questions of ultimate concern" as questions about what is *real*: Is God real? Is love real? Is consciousness real? Is free will real? But what, then, does "real" mean? Clearly, the fallibility of knowledge presents a problem for the concept of reality. This may be no surprise, as "the epistemic turn" in philosophy and cognitive science tells us that all percepts and concepts are constructions of the mind (or mind/body/culture). Yet the later "ontological turn" re-vindicated the notion that human beings must, and unavoidably do, construct sturdy reliable knowledge about reality. In addition, following the pragmatist's intuition, knowledge and "truths" about reality are simply cognitive tools that can be assessed according to their correspondence to reality, or their usefulness in negotiating reality. As physical and social beings acting in the world we must continuously be making mostly correct assumptions about reality in order to survive physically and socially. So one actually *can* "seriously" make claims about the nature of reality (even "ultimate reality"), as long as one understands these claims as provisional and emerging from human meaning-making labor.

We have already said a few things about what can be considered to be "real." We have noted that what seems real differs for different developmental levels (and we explore this further later under the topic "adequatio"). We have also argued that one does not need to posit extra realms or absolute realities to account for the various types of objects and phenomena of experience and thought. In what follows we will explore the many ways in which things can be, or be understood as, real – by the ordinary mature (3rdPP) adult considering everyday ideas – i.e. simple objects not requiring metaphysical esotericism or philosophical scholarship to understand.

The cacophony of perspectives on "precisely what constitutes reality?" can be partially clarified by an *enumeration of the types of things* said to be real, or included in reality. The most obviously real objects are *concrete* instances – *that* bottle and *this* flower. The next slight step in abstraction is the *class* of objects: bottles and flowers are real (though the class itself is an abstraction, because one will never see all of the instances). Sensory *properties* seem particularly real, though they are abstract: red, round, heavy, etc. (we will never observe redness by itself, only as a property). Slightly more abstract are *processes* and verb-like objects (e.g. flying, reproduction, growth), *events* (e.g. a season, a cultural revolution), and *systems* (e.g. the weather, a transportation infrastructure). *Change* presents a thorny problem for those desiring philosophical precision – the river changes in every moment, and one's body has a subtly different makeup from one moment to the next, yet both are considered real objects.

At higher levels of abstraction and generality we find *natural laws and causal mechanisms* such as gravitation and evolution, which could be said to exist either as foundational realties or merely as explanatory fictions (see Bhaskar, 1978; Elster, 1999). Also problematically "real" are so-called *social constructions* such as money and gender (Searle, 1995). For example: is money a real thing, or simply the coordination of trust agreements and recordkeeping ledgers? Are gender and race real or social constructs with no basis in "reality?" In our approach, *all* of the above types of things can be considered real – one can spread one's arms around the scope of interpretations of reality, rather than be forced to pick one.

Bhaskar's "Critical Realism" argues that the *unobservable mechanisms, structures, and tendencies* that generate the observable world are just as real as observable concrete reality. He points out that science makes ontological commitments that things such as the laws of physics are real. Robust scientific discoveries would not be possible were there not some real, though invisible, mechanisms or forces behind or beneath the natural patterns and objects that we study.

The more *abstract* a concept the more one must stretch the concept of "real" away from concrete reality to include it. Concepts that frequent spiritual discussion such as mind, the self, and morality – can be claimed as real but it is difficult to separate their objective reality from the cognitive processes that find patterns in sense data and construct or infer abstract entities. Particularly problematic are the *most* abstract concepts, such as truth, goodness, beauty, form, system, object, change, causation, pattern, and yes, "reality" itself; and also the foundational spiritual concepts that we have discussed, such as God, Spirit, Ground of Being, Emptiness, etc.

Philosophers have coined the term "*hyper-object*" to refer to objects or systems that are so large and complex that humans cannot possibly comprehend them; especially including systems that we are embedded within (Morton, 2013). For example, the phenomena of climate change, the global economic system, and cultural evolution are hyper-objects – tangled conglomerations of interacting components spread across huge swaths of time and space that we can only glimpse facets of, yet must humbly try to understand.

Habermas, Wilber, and Bhaskar are among the philosophers who champion an ontological commitment that *subjective* realities are just as real as objective realities. If one approached this from a 3rdPP action logic one might take sides in arguing whether subjective "objects" are in fact real or not. But through a more flexible 4thPP reasoning one can say that subjective things like

ideas, plans, feelings, perceptions, assumptions, stories, and theories are as important and impactful as concrete realities. As Bhaskar says, these thing are "causally efficacious," having definitive impact upon reality, and are thus real. Thus, rather than quibbling over the definition of a word ("real"), one can claim that it is important to extend the definition of real to include subjective objects – elevating subjectivity and objectivity to equal ontological status. (So-called "idealists" would claim that subjectivity is *more* real – but that is a regression to 3rdPP thinking.)

One can make the case that hypotheticals, myths, creative imaginals, and counter-factuals – i.e. claims or narratives that involve what is *not* actually the case (or is not actually "real") – are also real. Surely the things that we imagine in order to avoid, and fictitious stories spun from the imagination, have enormous impact on life. Critical Realism goes as far as to claim that negation, i.e. *absence* is real. For example, any change can be described as the negation of something making way for the emergence of something new, making non-being just as important as being.

Absence is certainly causally efficacious, for example: the absence of a liver in an animal; the absence of a key ingredient in a recipe, the absence of justice in a government. Reality is composed of complex systems at all levels, including galaxies, animals, ecosystems, and cultures. Such systems are "complex adaptive," "self-organizing," or "autopoietic" systems that persist through self-preservation processes as they interact with environments that "feed" them while simultaneously threatening to destroy them. Such systems persist through delicate and precise synergistic relationships, such that if one key component is removed the entire system might break down. Absence is real.

Bestowing absence with an ontological status equal to presence is important to Bhaskar's overall philosophy of human ethics and emancipation. Ignorance, denial, lies, and shadow-material are types of absence – demi-realities that have grave impacts. To ameliorate demi-reality is to absent such absences. The term "negative capability" mentioned earlier reminds us of the importance of acknowledging the realm of the unknown and non-existent. If human flourishing is one of the most important goals that we can have, then, Bhaskar argues, we have to take negation seriously and give it a prominent ontological status that supports our focused awareness of it.

Bhaskar's associating absence with emancipation provides a useful hook for grounding spiritual concepts such as emptiness and non-duality in compassion. This lessens the possibility that such concepts will be used to take flight into abstract "absolute" realities that are open to the phenomena of "spiritual materialism" and "spiritual bypass."

In what sense real? In sum, all of these things, in addition to concrete observable objects, can be considered real: classes, abstractions, and generalities; processes and properties; hyper-objects; theories and models; ideas, stories, hypotheticals, and social constructions (subjectives); physical laws and causal tendencies; and even absences. In addition, what is considered real depends on the capacities of, and context of, the observer.

The more abstract an object, the more difficult it is to tease apart its being as an ontological "reality" from its being as a subjective construction. Importantly, if we agree on this then we *do not have to argue or decide* whether something is objective or subjective – we can acknowledge how it is in some ways objective and in some ways subjective, and move on. This is actually (and

recursively) necessary, since "objective" and "subjective" are themselves high abstractions – not concrete objects that are easy to get a solid fix on.

The social negotiation of beliefs is replete with disagreements and impasses concerning what is real. In such cases the problem is often that interlocutors have different meanings for the "real," rather than that they agree on the definition but differ in its application. As we discuss more later, it is unavoidable that abstract words such as "real" have indeterminate meanings, i.e. they are interpreted differently by different individuals and in different contexts. One aspect of the 4thPP action logic (and even more in 5thPP) is that one learns to accept and accommodate to this disconcerting fact of language – whereas at earlier action logics one fights against it, trying to nail down the definition of terms, or arguing from one's own definitions, seeing others' arguments through one's own definitions. Of course, it is wise to refine and agree on term definitions as much as we can – the point is that it is impossible in the limit, and unlikely in contentious dialogues stemming from different world-views.

Our description of the many ways that things can be considered real illustrates this definitional indeterminacy. The same issues have been noted for "true" as for "real." For example Richard Kirkham, in *Theories of Truth, A Critical Introduction* (1992), shows that there are a multitude of definitions of truth implied in academic Philosophy and Logic. He shows that disagreements about the nature of truth are often the result of scholars talking past each other, unaware that they are using quite different senses of the word. By teasing out the various senses of "truth," Kirkham hopes to help philosophers clarify their inquiry.

All of this is to say, that the question "is it real?" is insufficient, as there are so many senses of the term; and the better question is "*how* is it real?" or conversely "in what sense is something *not* real (or less real)?" Within 2ndPP dogmatic belief systems and 3rdPP logical arguments, scholars may forever be writing lengthy treatises defining reality, and laymen may forever be spieling sloppy arguments about it – all in hopeless attempts at conclusiveness. The only way out is to abandon the question "*Is* it real?" and move to the more pragmatic question "*In what sense* is it real?" (and, conversely, In what sense not real?). As Bhaskar's says: "the relevant question is not whether ideas are real, but what kind of reality they have, and whether ideas of different type...have different kinds of reality" (Bhaskar, 1997, p. 142). Another way to employ "in what sense" is to ask "under what definition of the terms (consciousness, God, country...) can I see some truth in the statement?" We call this general approach "interpretive pluralism."

This is also the case for moving from "Is it true?" to "In what sense is it true?" (balanced with: "and from what perspectives does it seem false?"). But we are focusing our conversation in this text to ontological questions about what is real, not the larger topic of how to evaluated the truth of an idea, because real-ness is at the core of metaphysical inquiry. Though scholars may need to define clear sub-categories of the real, as we began to enumerate above, what is important to readers of this text is to know that there are many valid perspectives on the question; and it might add sufficient nuance to a conversation to say that, for example, an object is real "in the way that a law of physics is real," or "in the way that human intentions are real" – without needing a carefully mapped out taxonomy of types of real-ness.

Some philosophers make the case that invisible underlying laws and mechanisms, such as mathematical principles, quantum laws, information flows, or psychological archetypes, are *more* real, perhaps meta-real or hyper-real, compared to concrete reality. Again, though the point about the importance of unseen realities is taken, this regresses to a 3rdPP need for definitional certainty, and we suggest moving away from trying to claim which aspects of reality are *most* real. "In *what sense* is it real?" shifts the discourse from a definitional argument into a dialogic inquiry allowing for multiple nuances and perspectives. For example, there are important insights available in both the claims: the flowing river is a bona fide object, vs. the flowing river is an unreal illusion of a solid object. Perhaps there are a dozen perspectives on how the river is real or not real. Considering them is more difficult – it requires more effort. It can be a "pain in the ass" like trying to listen attentively to every single person at the family holiday gathering. But doing that creates new possibilities for mutual regard and intimacy as well as deeper understanding.

Is God real? Is love real? Is consciousness real? Is free will real? Interpretive pluralism represents a post-metaphysical (4thPP) move towards a flexible, appreciative, participatory, evolutionary, and ultimately more ethical approach to spiritual inquiry, belief, and being.

Constructing the Real

Enaction. "In what sense...?" (interpretive pluralism) creates an opening to deepening perspectives, information, and relationships. But it also adds complexity that may be overwhelming to interlocutors, or inappropriate to a situation, resulting in "analysis paralysis" or unhelpful dissonance. So, pragmatically, a balance is to be found between sticking to what one believes and opening to the unknown in each situation. This is particularly true when decisions need to be made and when time is a factor – i.e. when *action* is needed. Which brings us to another aspect of our inquiry into "what is real?" – that reality is "*enacted*."

This perspective is closely aligned with the philosophical tradition of Pragmatism that sees ideas as tools. Sean Esbjörn-Hargens says "the ontological status of [a soda] bottle is enacted in part by the method of interacting with it…The reality of the bottle as instrument, vase, or cash refund is not [merely] dependent on your viewpoint but rather on the social practice of interacting with the bottle" (2010, p. 13). The "reality," or meaning of a thing evolves as we interact with it. At a cognitively more basic level, an organism's sensory-motor relationship with an object is what confers the object's reality upon it (see Kiverstein & Clark, 2009). The reality of a fly is different to animals who "see" it with echolocation vs. vision vs. smell; and is different for animals for whom the fly as prey vs. predator vs. nuisance.

And, for the human animal, speech is also an action that confers reality. We have already mentioned how, at the magical substrate of cognition, speaking or naming something confers it with reality (or life or power). "Ontological legislation" is a term used when those in power dictate the naming of things, and in so doing create social realities. But, of course, poets and mystics also serve that cultural function. Words not only describe but words, and actions, *disclose* reality.

Let us not err so far on the side of epistemology that we assume that the world is only what we create it to be. Thought can cast conceptual boundaries around objects, and is free to roam wildly among hypothetical realities – but concrete reality is something one "bumps into" and calls to be

dealt with (as in Dick's "Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away"). Our goal in this chapter is to support a more adequate intuition of when and how ideas are likely to be inflicted with various sorts of demi-reality – we are trying to "mind the gap" between the real and ideas.

The symbolic impulse: contours of the real vs. ideas. The third "historical arc" that we painted above proposed that the story of human wisdom can be told in terms of increasing depth and clarity in how one understands the relationship between the real vs. ideas – i.e. how one maps out demi-reality. Demi-reality can be described – and ameliorated – in several ways. First, through the basic habits of critical thinking and humility, i.e. reflecting on whether an idea might be biased based on one's unexamined assumptions or egotistic attachments. Second, one can reduce demi-reality through methodologies such as the scientific method or multi-stakeholder dialogues. These 3rdPP methods are well known (though not necessarily practiced). Our focus here is on 4thPP approaches (and beyond) for understanding and ameliorating demi-reality – illustrating principles that are not quite as apparent to the average person (or even the average scholar or spiritual sage). To this end we will more deeply explore the relationship between ideas and the real by noting some fundamental properties of reality vs. ideas – specifically the structural differences between concrete reality and mental constructs. We will use the term "epistemic drives" for tendencies of the mind that bias conceptualization or interpretation.

First, consider concepts, which are the fundamental building blocks of ideas (or similarly, consider words, which are the building blocks of language). All abstract thought (or at least all socially shared thought) is built using words or concepts that, essentially, split the world into categories. Reality is rarely as simple as these categories. In the very act of speaking or conceptualizing one produces some demi-reality – even though language it is an indispensible tool and an unavoidable element of culture. (We use the term demi-real rather than falsehood or imagination because ideas are real in that, through people's actions, they have causative impact on concrete reality.)

The faculty of using concepts, a cognitive tendency that we will call the "symbolic impulse," implicitly confers certain false properties upon reality. It makes reality appear as if it is composed of tidy categories with clear boundaries. One often knows and compensates for the fact that reality does not exist in this tidy way, but still, there is an aspect of cognition (the symbolic impulse) that compels one in this direction. If one calls someone an "introvert" or an "intelligent person" we might need to add qualifiers that nuance the starkness of the categories (e.g. "usually an introvert" or "intelligent but not very wise"). Of course, categories express important truths as well as demi-realities: all fish and all cities *do* have something in common worth highlighting. The symbolic impulse, or we could say language itself, is, as many a sage has noted, is both a blessing and a curse.

Abstractions are simplifications over real objects that ignore certain properties and highlight others. A tree can be a plant, an alive being, a piece of wood, a scaffold for climbing, a structural element of a shelter, etc. – and with each naming we emphasize something and ignore something else about the object, generating another morsel of demi-reality.

The drive to categorize combined with the drive to abstract creates *hierarchies* of categories such as taxonomies. We have learned to comprehend many such "epistemic forms." Other forms

include tables, Venn diagrams, scatterplot graphs, etc. Such models seem to explain much and empower us – and often they do – but with each tidy organization some demi-reality is created as a byproduct.

We have mentioned another epistemic drive: the pull toward conceptual oneness, unity, totality, or essentialism exhibited in metaphysical thinking. This can make concepts appear to cover more range, or explain more of reality, than they actually do. The more abstract a concept is, the more it may relate to "questions of ultimate concern," and thus acquires more meaning-generative importance. A dilemma results from the fact that the most abstract concepts can contain the most demi-reality. The ideas people become most attached to may be the most nebulous. The conceptual boundaries over which people fight the most aggressive battles can have the vaguest of demarcations. The more vague or subjective an idea, the harder one must argue for its objective truth, and the more one must strain reason to champion it. This is of course often the case in religious and spiritual discourse.

We will return later to discuss how cognitive science has investigated epistemic drives. But here our goal is to outline some of the properties that conceptualization, or thought in general, confers upon reality, and compare those properties with fundamentally valid properties of perceptual reality. This becomes one tool for reducing demi-reality through post-metaphysical thinking. One can notice when one's perceptions (and conceptions) of reality contain demi-real properties that might be conferred by epistemic drives, vs. when one's perceptions (and conceptions) of reality contain properties more typical of reality itself. I.E. we can learn to better mind the gap between the real and ideas.

Repleteness and projected properties. Actual objects in concrete reality are "replete" – which is to say they cannot be completely described with a finite number of properties. Concrete reality is also said to "withdraw" from begin captured by categories and ideas. The closer one looks, the more detail one finds. Thus, any finite description of a dog, a fork, a city, a family, etc. will be incomplete. The abstractions used to describe actual objects – brown, made of silver, democratic, happy, etc. – capture only a facet of the object, and actual objects can be described with ever-increasing levels of depth from endlessly multiplying perspectives.

Concrete reality is not only replete with seemingly endless details, it is unfathomably *complex*, harboring interrelationships among the endless details (parts), at many levels of emergence, arising co-dependently. An actual person, for example, is replete and hyper-complex. In minding the gap between reality and ideas, one can track, in a rough sense, when one is moving more toward the repleteness and complexity that characterize the contours of concrete objects, vs. the simplicity that characterizes ideas and ideals.

We must make clear here that the repleteness and complexity of real objects are challenges for the *conscious linguistic mind* – i.e. for the symbolic impulse. Objects withdraw as one tries to describe them with concepts and words. But at the level of unconscious raw experience, or "being," there is no problem. The physical body interacts smoothly and (usually) unproblematically with physical objects despite their repleteness and complexity. The "social body" participates in social interactions (usually) without getting hung up their on massive complexity. The automatic unconscious layer of the body/mind spawns conversations, plays sports, parents children, and

mingles at social gatherings – just *doing* and not thinking about what one is doing. (See more in the Deep Dive box on The Unconscious in a later section.)

Abstractions are created by highlighting common properties of objects and discarding other properties as irrelevant (for the purpose at hand). For example, tool, chair, and democracy are (moderately) abstract concepts that group less abstract objects together into a class with common properties. Human language and reason depend heavily on the capacity to create abstractions – so far so good. But each abstract concept becomes an entity that can take on a life of its own, somewhat separate from the objects that originally defined it. For example, one may come to learn or believe certain things about tools (or chairs or democracies) that do not hold for all of the instances of the class. One may associate democracies with capitalism, or workmanship with tools – when in fact the associate does not always hold true. In this way properties are *projected onto* objects based upon the class(es) that we ensconce them in.

Ideally, reason includes an ongoing dialectic between concrete reality and abstract ideas – testing for demi-reality and modifying ideas and ideals as necessary. But of course this is often not the case, and abstractions that contain fallacious associations spread and wreak havoc (in religious and spiritual thinking, and elsewhere). The useful purity of the abstraction can become the totalizing cognitive hegemony of the ideal entity or the ideological vision.

These problematics find one extreme in metaphysical objects. Ideals such as God, Spirit, Eros, élan vital, and Gaia are more than abstractions over objects in the world. And, because they are thought to exist in some (metaphysical) reality, they are more than metaphorical extensions of concrete reality. Such objects are pure of the gritty details and repleteness of concrete reality, not because of the practical utility of the generalization, but because such purity is essential to their very nature. Because such concepts are only useful because they influence concrete life, it is inevitable that their purity, in addition to its benefits, is projected upon and clashes with "reality" in a proliferation of the demi-real. Ideals such as God can become "reified" in the mind to take on concrete features and be projected onto the world – e.g. the old man with a white beard who is both loving and harshly just.

Metaphysical objects, being unconstrained by the rules of both concrete reality and subjective reality, are free to accumulate ad-hoc properties with no crosschecking with objective facts or subjective insights. As long as they remain logically consistent within the bounds of some worldview or dogma, they propagate freely among past and potential "believers."

For example, consider the metaphysical concept of Gaia – a vision of the earth as a quasi-conscious living system. Gaia refers to more than an emergent system of systems, it imbues this meta-system (the earth) with additional properties and explanatory narratives that, while seductive and meaningful, blur the distinction between facts and values, science and imagination. Earth, now as Gaia, takes on qualities of the protective yet wrathful mother, or perhaps the vulnerable nursery that we must nurture. The concept of Gaia can be skillfully used to coax the qualities of mutual dependence, care, respect, and gratitude from the mythical level of collective consciousness. But at the extreme the narrative of Gaia becomes a fiction that *limits* pragmatic possibilities in reality rather than being a conceptual tool held *accountable* to the contingencies of reality.

This can happen with any metaphysical object. Properties such as intentionality, omnipresence, kindness, and perfection can easily accrue onto non-living abstractions to take up the detail-sparse space opened up by high abstraction. Any property that enhances the deeper purpose or intention motivating an ideology can be attracted to and attached to an object's definition. The concepts of Spirit or Consciousness accrue omnipresence because accruing those properties meets the psychological, cultural, or political needs that created the ideals in the first place. In so doing the concept gains larger "meaning" but withdraws further from actuality.

As another example, consider the scientific concept of gravity. It is an abstraction with a simple definition and discoverable nature. If gravity were to be appropriated for religious purposes to become "Gravity," it would be assumed to exist in a different way, and, over time, would accrue new properties from magical and mythical thinking, which would simply be believed, and would be beyond empirical validation. Being part of reality one might assume that Gravity is replete as well, and one might, in a proto-scientific esoteric inquiry, endeavor to inquire into the many properties of the "thing" that exists "out there" – an object now completely unmoored from its simple original definition. Gravity then becomes mysterious, not in the way that quasars or neutrinos are mysterious, but in the way that Zeus and Aliens and Fairies are mysterious – as if they were actual entities, complex compositions having autonomous replete natures. In doing so we seem to know more than we do, and create additional levels of bias, illusion, and certainty – rather than employing the negative capability of holding unknowing and paradox.

Below we include three side-bar Deeper Dives titled "Enfoldment paradoxes," "Faux dualities and paradoxes," and "Illusory recursions" that describe additional ways that ideas import demi-real properties upon concrete reality.

The reproduction of metaphysical concepts such as God, Eros, and Absolute Self *within* a community of believers may seem to have more utility than hazard. But, in the modern cosmopolitan hyper-connected world, it is better for ideas to have "*portability*." The fallibilities and indeterminacies of ideas might be safely ignored within "the choir" of a particular community or world view, but ideas, especially metaphysical ideas, become problematized when one wants to: (a) *cross* disciplinary boundaries to interact with other communities, (b) *apply* these ideas and *explain* one's purposes to stakeholders, or (c) have a constructive *dialogue* with others who don't agree with some aspect of the theory or model.

I call this the "idea portability principle:" that understanding and dealing with the indeterminacy of ideas is more important the greater the distance between the worldviews or beliefs of interlocutors. Reaching out to, positively affecting, *and being affected by* individuals with other world-views is central to any sustainable ethical and emancipatory vision of human potential.

Deeper Dive: Faux dualities and paradoxes

It may be that in some way, "I love her and I hate her," or that "its sort of a fruit and sort of a vegetable," but the symbolic impulse insists that I either love *or* hate her; and that its either a fruit *or* a vegetable. Above we argued for approaches that resist the symbolic impulse, and the vain confrontations it entails, to allow one to say, for example, "I love her in a sense; I hate her in a sense," and to get on with exploring what is revealed about life within each of those senses. Some may struggle with the notion that a person may be a progressive but also, in a sense, a conservative (and in another sense neither) –

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though at more mature levels of cognitive development such false dualities loose their insistence and force.

Though a mature person may easily avoid being distracted by such faux paradoxes in concrete everyday life, faux paradoxes and false dualities run deep. They are more difficult to identify and weed out within *abstract* thought, and they persistently plague even sophisticated philosophical and spiritual dialogue. For example, it might seem impossible that a thing can be, for example: both spirit and matter, both interior and exterior, both individual and collective; both a state and a stage; or both empty and full. (Kant, who stands at the juncture between 3rdPP and 4thPP cognition, historically ushering in the later, struggled with paradoxical "antimonies." He had to resort to metaphysics to muffle their disturbing character). Physicists continue to struggle with how light can be both a particle and a wave. In all of these cases, an object that defies abstract categories should not be seen as a paradoxical mystery of the universe, but rather as an indication that certain human categories fail to be useful for certain questions. For example light is one thing that appears particle-like in some contexts and wave-like in others – we don't seem to have the perceptual primitives or metaphorical resources to comfortably comprehend an object that is simultaneously both. "To be or not to be?" We might answer: perhaps both and neither (as suggested by Indian philosopher Nagarjuna) – or we can *reject the question* as unhelpful.

Post-modern philosophers Claude Lévi-Strauss and Jacques Derrida are known for exploring how language and culture manufacture dualities. To create a category X is to simultaneously raise the possibility of not-X. Constructing "liberal" co-begets "conservative," as with "good vs. evil" and "sane vs. crazy." The symbolic impulse that wants one to place people into one or the other category is, of course, a powerful tool of thought, but it also creates great suffering. In spiritual contexts, the modern mind easily senses the fallacies within polarities like "good vs. evil," "saint vs. sinner," "believer vs. non-believer," and "heaven vs. hell." But more subtle dualities remain. For example, above we questioned the usefulness of the "Absolute vs. Relative" Two-Truths doctrine.

Base or concrete reality (we claim here) is not structured through simple categories – which, rather, are imposed upon it by the symbolic impulse. When we use the concept "ego" (or self) the symbolic impulse steers us into conversations about egolessness (or selflessness) – "Does mystical sage X have an ego?" or "Is spiritual achievement level Y devoid of ego?" Increasingly we are learning that – damn it! – all of our so-called enlightened teachers sure seem to have *some* sort of ego-thing going on. The more useful (4thPP/5thPP) question is "*how* does ego/self manifest" for a given person or level (or does the concept itself cease to make useful distinctions in some contexts?)? The same is true for being vs. non-being, awake vs. non-awake, liberation vs. delusion, nature vs. nurture...all polarities that have some use, but run out of steam when closer scrutiny is necessary.

The magical strata of cognition, which does not well differentiate interiors from exteriors, experiences a type of mystical elation within the symbolic impulse. In constructing a concept, for example "dark," the concept of "light" presents itself so immediately and strongly that both seem to exist in a hyper-real Platonic world of Forms (rather than a demi-real world of human construction).

In philosophy Kant answered Descartes' theoretical split between mind vs. matter with his theory of phenomena (experience) vs. noumena (reality's unknowable "thing in itself"). Hegel then critiqued Kant's unknowability of reality by showing how subject and object interpenetrate with each other. But all of these philosophers built their theories atop conceptual dualisms (including Hegel's synthesis and antithesis). The demi-reality introduced by these dualities inevitably leaves weaknesses in a theory that are picked apart by subsequent thinkers. There is no escape from an infinite sequence of renovations for such theories if they are built upon clean-cut categories.

In the synthetic approach attributed to Hegel, a contradictory thesis and antithesis are resolved into a synthesis, a concept at an emergent higher level of understanding. However, sometimes the thesis and antithesis are best tolerated or emptied rather than transcended. If the contradiction or duality is seen as an epiphenomena, i.e. a demi-real artifact of the symbolic impulse, then the better approach is to release the concepts' hold on meaning-making.

The classical Greek laws of logic are 3rdPP principles that assume pristine categories satisfying the symbolic impulse. These laws are: the law of identity: 'Whatever is, is' (A=A); the law of contradiction: 'Nothing can both be and not be' (A and not-A cannot both be true); and the law of the excluded middle: 'Everything must either be or not be" (Either A is true, or not-A is true). At the 4thPP action logic one allows for the fallibility of these laws. While acknowledging their value in many contexts, one can conceptualize the grey zones and liminal spaces of a "fuzzier" logic.

Because they are so intimately tied to language and other cognitive functions, dualities will remain a given. In addition to reflecting on their limitations we can also see them as gifts. They, especially the potent dualities found in spiritual discourse, point to very real tensions that exist in the conceptual or perceptual mind. We can use the energy behind such dualities, for example, saints and sinners, freedom and dependence, mind and matter, to generate potentially healing insights.

Deeper Dive: **Enfoldment paradoxes**

Concrete objects in reality obey laws that abstract concepts in the mind do not. In concrete reality if one object is fully *contained by* another, the later cannot contain the former. But this principle does not apply to abstractions. If one is under the spell of the symbolic impulse, one can become baffled when abstract ideas behave differently than concrete objects. For example, is ontology explained by (covered within) epistemology or is it the other way around? It often happens that a theory or framework can be seen by its adherent to completely supersede, explain, and contain another theory; while adherents of the second theory will claim the opposite – that *their* theory supersedes, explains, and contains the first. A neutral onlooker might see that, in a sense, both are correct.

Is mind inside matter, as an emergent phenomenon of the brain and evolution? Or is matter (and all reality) inside the mind (or Mind) or inside of consciousness (or Consciousness)? Is non-dual realization above and transcending regular consciousness or below and underpinning it? Such questions are unanswerable paradoxes of enfoldment, but only *if* one expects abstractions to obey the laws of concrete reality.

The same phenomena seen in metaphorical enfoldment can be seen in metaphorical underpinning. For example, is Consciousness the foundational essence of all reality? Or maybe its Love, or Creative Potential, or Unmanifest Potential... When all of these objects are seen as concepts rather than metaphysical realities – as tools we use, perspectives we take, and artifacts we play with – such confusions about absolutes, foundations, and essences are seen through.

Deeper Dive: **Illusory recursions**

Another casualty of the symbolic impulse, is the perception of superfluous recursive fractal structures. These can be seen in conceptual systems including Yin/Yang or Masculine/Feminine polarity principles, astrology, and personality typing systems. For example, if one attempts to forcefully cleave reality into Yin and Yang categories, one eventually must admit that there is some Yin-like essence within the Yang category, and vice versa – resulting now in four categories. But then again, within the Yin-inside-the-

Yang, there can be found yet another essence of Yin, and so on, in an infinite recursion of conceptual fine-tuning through splitting. To the 2ndPP and 3rdPP mind it might seem fascinating that reality is so complex and mysterious. Yet this beautiful recursive structure is an illusion – an artifact of the original impulse to cleave. If one resists the symbolic impulse to partition reality into neat categories, the problem never arises.

Similarly, in astrology, which has 12 categories, one is first classified by one's sun sign. But personality is too complex for that, so one has a moon sign within the sun sign to add nuance and better approach reality. But of course two categories are insufficient so deeper analysis is done – adding additional layers of nuance, in a not-quite-infinite regress. The same happens with personality typing systems such as the Myers-Briggs 16-type system. The main classification is too simplistic and additional layers are added: perhaps one category is used for one's relationship to self and another for one's relationship to others, resulting in a 16x16 matrix of possibilities. Which is insufficient, so perhaps both the self-type and the others-type are subdivided into orientations to the past vs. the future, producing a 16x16x16 system.

The spectacle is comparable to the epicycles that Ptolemy invented to explain the motion of heavenly bodies. They were an epiphenomena created by assuming the planets revolve around the earth. It is not that such systems of classification are not useful – they provide powerful ways to describe real differences between entities. The problem comes when one takes them too seriously, as if reality *must* be constrained to fall within these man-made categories. Then the conceptual halls of mirrors become inevitable.

Concrete reality does of course contain objects exhibiting actual fractal patterns – we do not imply that such patterns are always illusory. But, I suspect that reality does not, in itself, contain *paradoxes*, but rather that each object or occurrence just "is what it is" regardless of whether humans can comprehend it.

Adequatio. In this final subsection we will tie the philosophical principles of epistemology and ontology from this chapter more closely to the concept of development explored in the prior chapter – and in so doing create a bridge to the next chapter on embodied cognition. As may already be clear to the reader, any answer to "what is real?" (or "what is true?") depends on the perspective that the question is asked from and answered from. Though there are many types of "perspectives," in an important way meaning-making depends on *developmental* perspective.

Above we have rejected the "view form nowhere", to say that all truth claims are made "by someone from somewhere." There are various ways to describe the someone and somewhere that shape each view of reality. Widely acknowledged shaping forces include a person's experience, knowledge, biases, intentions, culture, and theoretical framework. The contextual cues and emotional bio-physiology of the moment also impact one's "perspective." Less often acknowledged, but critically important, are developmentally-determined capacities. That is to say, one perceives objects according to the level of conceptual complexity that one has developed in any domain. For example, the expert woodsman sees objects and patterns in the wild that others do not see; and the experienced conflict mediator will see phenomena and opportunities unseen by others. If a thing cannot be "seen" by someone it is not "real" for that person. This follows Schumacher's (and, earlier, Plotinus') notion of *adequatio,* which says that "the understanding of the knower must be adequate to the thing to be known" (Schumacher, 1977, p. 39).

Wilber and Esbjörn-Hargens propose a framework called "integral post-metaphysics" that reframes the question of *whether* something is real to ask *how* it is real for *whom*. The "how" refers to the methodology used to inquire and the "whom" refers to the developmentally-determined capacity of the observer/inquirer (Wilber 2006; Esbjörn-Hargens, 2010). Methodologies are classified according to the 8 "primordial perspectives" or "methodological zones" in Wilber's AQAL matrix. The details are beyond our scope, but the main idea is that, for example, the method used to observe or measure – for example a microscope, a telescope, subjective introspection, or using a population survey – will have a strong influence on the objects and patterns that can be see and deposited within the scope of "reality."

The classification of developmental levels in integral post-metaphysics is closely related to the person-perspective levels mentioned in this text. For a child at the magical level of development, Santa Claus is real. Among a group of children the question "What kind of cookies does Santa Clause like best?" is a valid question about reality. Santa Clause can also exist for *us* if we "suspend the disbelief" of higher developmental action logics and enter the magical thinking strata of consciousness.

Esbjörn-Hargens and Zimmerman (2009) give the example of "ecosystem." An ecosystem can exist, and claims about one can be made, only for those who have an adequate understanding of the concept, which requires the capacity to think at a level of complexity that can perceive how phenomena and wholes emerge from the chaotic and extremely complex interdependencies of a large number of parts. Cultures that have no conceptualization of an ecosystem may have difficulty designing ways to monitor or improve its health (though, obviously, the converse is not necessarily true, since cultures with sufficient complexity might still neglect ecosystems). Complex and/or abstract objects such as "the self," "consciousness," "human development," and "participatory spirituality" will necessarily be understood differently according to one's "complexity capacity" within any given theme of inquiry.

Another perspective on adequatio uses the idea of "epistemic forms" – generic or formal structures of understanding that come with rules for manipulating them (Collins & Ferguson, 1993). One example is the list, which is anything with a beginning, a sequence and an end. The list has just three modes of manipulation: adding and removing elements, and sorting them – this defines the rules of the "epistemic game" playable with lists. Tables and hierarchies are more complicated epistemic forms than list, because they include and extend the forms and "games" of the list.

Linear or categorical (black and white) structures are simpler than graded/spectral, networked, or branching structures; which are in turn simpler than co-referential/ paradoxical, interpenetrating/fractal/recursive/holographic, or constellational forms. Once one has mastered the general properties and dynamics of any epistemic form one can re-use that structure in multiple contexts – the 12 year old who "groks" the usefulness of tables has gained a powerful thinking tool. And conversely, if one has not built up an adequately complex cognitive toolbox of epistemic forms (and associated rules of the epistemic games), one cannot even "seen," never mind reason about, certain complex phenomena that others *can* see.

It is easy to put principles of adequatio to work in educational settings, as Collins and Ferguson did, and also easy to apply the related idea of meritocracy to assigning decision making to the most skilled – but it is difficult to apply it to subjects such as spirituality that rest closer to the heart of human identities. This is because it is difficult to avoid flavors of elitism or condescension if one claims a developmentally "higher ground" for oneself (or for another whom one references to support one's beliefs). In claiming developmental superiority, not only can it be socially awkward answering defensive charges of arrogance, but also, importantly, it is difficult to know when and how one's own biases make it seem that one possesses a superior encompassing perspective. The issue is exacerbated by the fact that it is, by definition, almost impossible for one to fully appreciate the implications and value of perspectives that are developmentally beyond where one is (for any given topic). For example, as Wilber explains with his "pre-trans-fallacy," to those at "conventional" action logics can incorrectly interpret the actions of post-conventional individuals as coming from pre-conventional motivations.

In practice what this means is that explanations or justifications referencing developmental "altitude" should be constrained according to a mutually agreed understanding of what developmental capacity means and how it is determined. This allows for discussion of the many ways ("developmental lines") that people can accumulate knowledge and wisdom (as well as they ways that people can be blind to what they don't know).

But doing this is not always pragmatically possible. The principle of adequatio can also be used to "manage expectations" regarding how much of one's understanding, or one's argument, is likely to be understood by others who have not had the opportunity to build cognitive complexity in the topic. It can also motivate one to help others build complexity and "perspectival range" rather than judging them as wrong or incompetent.

Reification and Misplaced Concreteness

A fascinating thing happens when ideas reach toward abstraction. Because of the deeply metaphorical nature of thought, which, as Lakoff shows is grounded in concrete sensory-motor constructs, abstract ideas cast a deep shadow back into the concrete strata of the mind even as they ascend to the heights of abstraction. This phenomena is called reification or misplaced concreteness (the later term was coined by Philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, 1929).

The usual definition of reification is: when an abstract object or idea is treated as if it were concrete (materially real). It is a type of "fallacy," like other cognitive illusions, in that one under its influence does not know that one is being "tricked" by a distortion of the mind operating below conscious awareness. The phenomenon of reification accounts for, or is closely related to, a large number of the sources of belief fallibility (demi-reality) including many we have discussed. Phenomena related to reification include the following, all of which are relevant to spiritual beliefs:

- "*Confusing the map with the territory*" – i.e. thinking as if the ideas baked into a theory, model, or story are more real that what they represent, such that reality, or one's interpretation of reality, must bend to fit the map (as opposed to the other way around). Coined by Alfred Korzybski: "A map is not the territory it represents, but, if correct, it has a similar structure to the territory, which accounts for its usefulness"(1958, p. 58).

- "*The myth of the given*" (coined by Wilfrid Sellars, 1956) – i.e. believing that one's perceptions of reality, which are in fact constructed subjective experiences, accurately represent objective reality.
- *The symbolic impulse* – which treats abstract concepts as if they had the properties of concrete objects: well-defined boundaries, durability, location, etc.
- *Anthropomorphism* – attributing human properties such as emotion and intentionality to natural or social objects, processes, or structures. For example: The Universe is kind; Mother Nature is protecting herself and will wipe out humanity if she needs to; the government wants all of my money and is forever scheming ways to take it.
- *Psychological projections* – for example, when I assume that others must have the same beliefs or perceptions that I have (and I become frustrated when the don't); or when one projects one's emotions or intentions upon people or objects ("why is everyone always angry at me?").
- *Magical thinking* – we have noted that magical thinking includes a confounding of exteriors and interiors, including projecting ideas and feelings out onto the world, e.g. the child freighted by the monster imagined under the bed, and the adult feeling chastised by God imagined as a man with a white beard living in the sky. The magical attribution of "real" powers to words and symbols is another form of reification.
- *Metaphysical "locations"* – when one places an idea in a "world" that is beyond space and time, but assumed to still somehow exist outside of subjectivity. For example, Plato's realm of Ideals, which hold the ideal forms of the Triangle and the Tiger, from which emanate all actual concrete triangles and tigers.
- *Metaphysical objects* – we noted that metaphysics is "the doctrine of ideas that equates being with thought," and that metaphysical objects such as Gaia, Mother Nature, Spirit, and "collective we" beings are "free to accumulate ad-hoc properties with no crosschecking with objective facts or subjective insights."

We see that the tendency of the mind to reify abstractions is widespread and multi-faceted. Actually, reification (misplaced concreteness) is more complicated than many realize. This is for reasons we have outlined above. Within its definition – i.e. treating abstractions as if they were concretely real – the concepts "abstract" and "concrete" (or real) are metaphorical pluralisms with an inconvenient range of meanings. We have discussed the many ways a thing can be real, or more-or-less real; and we have described a "ladder" of degrees of abstraction. Thus, we must conclude that reification is not a binary category but (surprise!) a graded category that admits to *degrees* of misplaced concreteness; and that the "fallacy" of misplaced concreteness is sometimes not so much of a fallacy after all.

For example, "blueness" is an abstraction and a quality constructed in the visual cortex, but in most contexts it is unproblematic to treat blueness as a real property of objects. Physicists propose the abstract concept of "force" to represent the relationship between mass and acceleration (F=ma), but they go further to treat forces as if they were real things in the cosmos. "Depression" is a somewhat abstract construct, and is not a daemon lurking in an actual metaphysical world trying to hunt us down, yet we must consider it *real* to seriously invest in treatments for it. A thing does not need to be made of material substance to be real – e.g. a decade. Lakoff's Primary Theory Of Metaphor claims that all abstract concepts are understood *only* in terms of concrete constructs, which implies that *some* degree of reification is happening in almost all beliefs. Look at that last

sentence – do theories make "claims" – is that anthropomorphic? Does it *really matter*? (Oh no, now I'm seeing reification in everything – "really" links to objective reality, and "matter" links to concrete matter.) If the phenomena are so ubiquitous and benign, why bother becoming aware of it?

But of course, reification it is not always benign. We have illustrated how sometimes-pernicious reification manifests differently within different developmental action logics. In 1stPP subjective objects and feelings are projected onto exteriors. In 2ndPP the stories we tell ourselves are assumed to be objectively real. At 3rdPP our magnificent, sublime, and elaborate models and theories hypnotize us into submission – we operate within seemingly objective "paradigms" that contain unexplored projections upon reality. The more abstract the idea, the more subtle and deeper the "shadow cast back into the concrete strata of the mind."

Process philosopher Bonnitta Roy quips "perhaps the only difference between children finding horses in clouds and philosophers discovering metaphysical properties in Consciousness is that the children know they are participating in their discoveries by adding imagination to perception whereas the Philosopher's do not".[5] At the level of concrete objects (1stPP and 2ndPP) even children can know when they are making-believe (though they often do not). At the level of high abstractions however (3rdPP), even eminent philosophers don't catch this trick of the mind in the act.

The reification of soul, spirit, consciousness, Eros and archetypes. In spiritual discourses soul, spirit, Higher Self (or Unique Self, or True Self), and consciousness seem to be both requisite and hotly debated concepts. Can the post-metaphysical perspective clarify some of the noise and dampen some of the ideological inflammation? One could argue that reification is behind much of the unnecessary fervor and angst.

First we can note that soul, spirit, Self, and consciousness are abstract concepts that, like all abstractions, admit to metaphorical pluralisms and indeterminate boundaries and definitions. Are they then fuzzy attempts to signify things that "really exist" but are difficult to put a finger on because they are complex and subtle? Or are they abstractions wholly created by the mind that are then projected out into a metaphysical world beyond time and space (like heaven but more abstract)? Given our post-metaphysical approach, we can reject the notion that they exist in some actual but metaphysical realm. But isn't it possible that such concepts are imperfect attempts to describe real phenomena? We must give the potentially unsatisfying answer: "probably partly."

These spiritual concepts may be the best we can currently do to make meaning of processes well beyond our understanding. But *to the extent* that we treat them as well-defined givens, or grasp tightly to their definition or use, or twist reality to make it conform to our preconceptions – we have moved dangerously into the territory of misplaced concreteness. Concepts such as Higher Self, Unique Self, True Self, Absolute Self, Soul, etc. can be quite useful in differentiating subtly different aspects of experience, but they should not be taken as Platonic Ideals or discrete forms in the metaphysical substrate. It might be clearer to say, for example, "The Unique Self *aspect* of the *experience* of self" – to make it clear one is referring to a property rather than an object, and thus avoid the strong (understandably human) tendency to reify Unique Self into something that defines

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[5] From a presentation to the Society of Consciousness Studies at Yale, 2017.

reality rather than the other way around. (See more about the concept of Consciousness in the Deep Dive box on that topic later; and for discussion of the self that "lives on," see the Deeper Dive on Supranormal entities.)

As another example, Wilber offers a framework for understanding how all objects in the cosmos (holons) develop or evolve – i.e. through the four interdependent primordial processes of Eros, Agape, Agency, and Communion (self-transcendence toward the higher, loving care of the lower/parts, self-preservation toward wholeness, and relationship toward emergence; Wilber, 2001). The cosmic "force" of Eros is common within other spiritual narratives as well. Again, such concepts are useful to differentiate vaguely perceived (subjective, un-measurable, unverifiable) properties or processes that seem ubiquitous throughout creation, and we can put them to good use while "minding the gap" of misplaced concreteness.

Concepts at the extremes of abstraction may suffer the most from the dislocated shadow projecting back to the concrete strata. In our discussion of Absolute Reality (or Absolute Truth) vs. Relative Reality (or Relative Truth), we noted how, given the definition of the absolute, *nothing* factual or actual could be said about it. What one is left with is poetry, paradox, or obscurity. The ontological interpretation of non-duality is similarly problematic. One cannot conceive of it without inferring its opposite, which is itself a duality. Similarly with the concept of emptiness – a deep exploration of the emptiness of anything leads one to acknowledge its "fullness" (or co-dependent arising). Emptiness is easily transformed from a perspective or property, i.e. all phenomena are empty *in a sense*, into an object called "Emptiness," which then, as an object, cannot be empty.

With all such highly abstract concepts, the drive to reify ultimately leads to contradictions. At the extreme, just as the 2ndPP mind can become mad with conspiracy theories (narratives), the 3rdPP (and later) mind can literally become insane with abstractions. Paradoxes arise that are unsolvable sources of tension at 3rdPP. Abstraction itself can be reified into a God or the foundational essence of reality. One can ruminate endlessly on the being of being, or awareness of awareness of awareness...

Metaphysical reification happens with moderately abstract gestalts, including so-called *archetypes,* as well as the highly abstract totalities mentioned above. Eros, The Lover, the Higher Self, The King, the Trickster, the etc. are psychological archetypes (though Wilber and others understand Eros in a more absolute sense). They can be productively understood as patterns of implicit belief structure that are universal in humans because all humans share in certain aspects of the drama of life, some of which we inherit from our animal ancestors (including: having parents along with the potentials for experiencing nurturing, helplessness, and abandonment; sexual attraction along with its implications for jealousy, devotion, and rejection; dominance hierarchies with their implications for competition, leadership, and tyranny; etc.). Archetypes are thus collectively shared, but to project them into metaphysical realms, where they become as eternal quasi-divine forces that reach down to influence humanity, is unnecessary from a post-metaphysical stance.

Archetypes and the spiritual concepts discussed above can be useful, but as high abstractions they are heavily clothed in hallucinatory projections such as faux-dualities. The drive to reify these

constructs works diametrically against one's capacity to separate the usefulness from the illusion (i.e. mind the gap of the demi-real). Thus the usefulness of archetypes and spiritual concepts such as spirit and soul are improved, rather than deconstructed, through post-metaphysical thinking.

Concepts such as spirit, soul, Higher Self, and Eros work well within magical and mythical modes of consciousness, sometimes super-charged with 3rdPP abstraction powers. Their main use is for making meaning within our "questions of ultimate concern." Even though they seem important, we should not argue about them as if (3rdPP) "truths" can be found there. In a future chapter we will suggest that "phenomenological" approaches may be the most productive knowledge-building methods for our age; while also suggesting that we should not jettison such metaphysical concepts, but choose and use them wisely.

Embodied Cognition and Epistemic Drives

From 4th into 5th Person Perspective

In this chapter we pivot from a strictly philosophical treatment of post-metaphysics and spirituality to one that relates more to (1) cognitive science and (2) felt experience. As readers will no doubt agree, any spirituality or metaphysics capable of sustaining humans into the next era must be grounded in the physical body and the concrete ethics of social life – even as it reaches into sublime visions and ideals that transcend those realities. Thus, we will explore human *drives* as they relate to the development of meaning-making processes; and will explore the implications of human reason being situated in a physical, biological, socially-embedded *body*. This exploration opens up the space for a more phenomenological inquiry into post-metaphysics – i.e., a felt understanding of the moment-to-moment interplay of confidence, uncertainty, curiosity, and dissonance that ground the search for meaning in the emotional movements of thought and in the ego's tremulous journey of self-determination, self-discovery, and self-liberation. What does it look like and *feel like* to shift into a post-metaphysical perspective on spirituality (or on anything)?

In one sense this text's themes have followed a developmental sequence that we can now extend into 5thPP. We began with a focus on the Magical and Mythical levels of cognition (1stPP, 2ndPP), which are about the stories we tell ourselves about what is real and true. We mentioned how the story-telling and object-crafting functions of mind carry forward into higher layers of consciousness, where abstraction and logic influence the mystical and metaphysical stories that we narrate. Though we mentioned that developmental theories are strongly grounded in science, we did not ground our argument in scientific findings. We used the developmental framework (of person-perspectives) as an orienting generalization to help understand a complex topic, and invited the reader to hold it lightly as a meaning-making tool, in a type of meta-story framing, without including scientific evidence for each of the many attributes we give each developmental level. The Interlude chapter included historically-oriented narratives, lifting our story-telling and meaning-making to a larger context. In a sense the approach up to this point was to tell a convincing and useful story, which is a 2ndPP approach to knowledge-building.

Then, in the next chapter, we moved to a "philosophical" approach that was more analytic, using more 3rdPP modes of inquiry. This 3rdPP mode was based on "rational reconstruction," i.e. logical arguments about what must be the case for a phenomenon to exist as observed. Though we did not

include much reference to (3rdPP) scientific findings, the overall character was still from a 3rdPP playbook. We also included invitations into 4thPP reasoning, by offering multiple perspectives to triangulate upon the complex systems of ideas that constitutes post-metaphysical thinking; and by inviting the reader to consider more intimately how post-metaphysical principles apply to one's own thought processes.

In this chapter we continue appeals to 3rdPP and 4thPP thinking, but include considerations that invite the reader into a 5thPP understanding of meaning-making. So far we have not much mentioned 5thPP, so let's explore its characteristics briefly.

Approaching 5thPP through individual and collective orientations. At 3rdPP one can see how thought and belief are influenced by what might be called "irrational" aspects of mind. It becomes a project then to clean up and perfect thinking and knowledge through rigor and reason. In religious contexts this can translate into more humanistic and less metaphysical interpretations of traditional wisdom. In spiritual contexts it can translate into an appreciation of contemplative practices for observing the mind and learning how the mind (or thought/emotion/sensation) works, toward the goals of cleansing thought and action of impurities, and realizing an inner peace that projects outward for others.

At 4thPP one shifts focus from the personalized aspects of "thinking/feeling," which can be experienced reflectively, to a collectively oriented focus on belief *systems*. At 3rdPP, with training, one can witness the nature of one's thoughts and emotions, including how one's emotions influence one's thoughts; and how one's desires influence one's beliefs. One *cannot* similarly look within to see, for example, prejudices born of misinformation, or that one's worldview is constrained by one's upbringing in Western Society. Revealing this stratum of demi-reality is a collective effort.

To access 4thPP insights I must listen to you, and "we" must listen to "them," in order to reveal belief limitations. Though we cannot directly observe cultural biases within the self, we can notice general patterns in how they operate in complex social flows of communicative action and knowledge formation, and we can become sensitive to the possibility that any belief could be fallible in ways that we cannot determine by ourselves. Truth-finding and reality-checking become more intimately linked with ethical concerns; our inquiry becomes ever-more necessarily participatory; and we realize that those who differ from us the most may hold the keys to our liberation from self-delusion.

At 4thPP one is also exploring the self more deeply. From the 3rdPP reflection on thought as it manifests in the moment, and knowledge as something that can be ever improved, one advances to noticing how the mind contains a cacophony of voices and perspectives that must be met, listened to, coordinated, and integrated – not only contemplatively "observed with equanimity." This listening is yet another project of opening to the complexity of diverse perspectives and allowing something new to emerge on its own terms, rather than efforting to tidy up a natural diversity as if it could be managed into compliance (at 3rdPP). At late 4thPP the self can be experienced as deeply intimate with all humans, and deeply at peace with the self's many parts (this is one possible manifestation of late 4thPP, though it is not by any means guaranteed).

In a sense, all of this at 4thPP is still dealing with the mind and self in terms of beliefs, stories, and narratives. We want to hear them, to give them voice and let them play together, and allow them to co-exist in peace or resolve into ever more beautiful meta-narratives – whether the stories exist among people or within the self. The narrative aspect of meaning-making can find both a resting place in depth and a great breadth in wisdom here.

Two aspects of 5thPP. At 5thPP there is yet another shift in the focus of attention. Rather than focusing on the interplay of narratives one naturally begins to deconstruct what it means to *have* a narrative. One more deeply sees the movements of mind that construct meaning "out of nothing," so to speak. There are two aspects to this movement. The first movement is a deeper glimpse into the emptiness of the self or ego. "Who is this self that seems to need meaning and needs to assimilate and excrete stories?" As the basis of cognitive operations rests more in raw awareness than in thinking, one's sense of self streams from empty-yet-alive awareness that can witnesses objects and stories arising in consciousness. The "I am" and "I am nothing" of spiritual lore takes on an experiential reality.

The second movement is a deconstructive glimpse into the emptiness of *concepts* – the building blocks of stories. Not only does one reflect critically upon the truth of (or perspectives on) an idea as whole, seeing it as constructed and biased in all the ways mentioned above, but one begins to deconstruct language itself, specifically the validity of conceptions (and perceptions). We have already entered into this territory in our philosophical ponderings above. From 5thPP one might put aside a question such as "Can love heal the world?" and notice more fundamentally how "love" "heal" and "world" have ambiguous definitions – meanings that may shift in the middle of a conversation. One might *feel into* an answer, but distrusts permanently putting it into words. In addition one can discover it more revealing to feel into the *question itself*.

4thPP experiences ideas as contingent stories that float in a context-dependent space of possible interpretations – that find temporary stability when interpretations agree. 5thPP moves deeper, experiencing words and concepts as fuzzy signifiers, each an entire world of possible meanings, that slide and stretch from moment to moment – finding momentary stability when the mind grasps to fixate upon a meaning. While 4thPP inquires about the validity and bias of meaning-making, 5thPP asks, in a sense, "what is the meaning (or function) of meaning-making?"

Another name for 5thPP (actually early 5thPP) is "construct aware." Susanne Cook-Greuter, who was the first to deeply explore this terrain developmentally, describes construct-aware this way: "[One becomes] cognizant of the pitfalls of the language habit [and starts] to realize the absurdity [or] limits of human map making. [The] linguistic process of splitting into polar opposites and the attending value judgments can become conscious...[one becomes] aware of the pseudo-reality created by words...aware of the profound splits and paradoxes inherent in rational thought...Good and evil, life and death, beauty and ugliness may now appear as two sides of the same coin, as mutually necessitating and defining each other" (2000, p. 21-30).

(Note again that development is not a strict ladder-like phenomenon. For example, one with a solidly developed 4thPP action logic can continue deepening 2ndPP and 3rdPP skills, and is probably already beginning to experience the types of insights we attribute to 5thPP.)

For an excellent example of a type of playfully metaphorical and construct-aware prose that gives a flavor of 5thPP thinking, see the article "Generative (En)closures, Bubbles, and Magic Circles" by Bruce Alderman (with contributions from Layman Pascal and Edward Berge) in this issue of Integral Review. Also, John Churchill (2018) illustrates the parallels between the three great epochs ("Turnings of the Wheel of Dharma") of Buddhist philosophy and insights about consciousness arising from 3rdPP, 4thPP, and 5thPP action logics (or modes of awareness), respectively.

Each developmental level includes exterior and interior aspects, and construct-aware thought is the exterior orientation of 5thPP consciousness. It is a level of sophistication in one's understanding of reality – as it appears in perception and conception. Concepts, percepts, i.e. objects as-they-appear, are seen to be, in a sense, "empty." Turning this piercing lens inward one begins to experience the self as empty as well, and begins to identify more with the bare processes of awareness than with traditional ego structures (a capacity also called "presence"). Bare awareness has been called "awareness without an object," and at this stage other aspects of consciousness can be similarly stripped down, yielding experiences such as *seeking* without an object (open awareness), *faith* without an object, and *compassion* without an object.

At 5thPP and higher the deconstruction of language impulses can lead to a stable stage of what has been called "non-symbolic experience," in which the perpetual "voice in the head" disappears to lay bare a "depersonalized" awareness (Castillo, 1990; Yaden et al., 2017). This experience is generally accessible as a temporary state through contemplative practices. However, achieving such states, which are in effect experiences of open perception and minimal conception, does *not* in any way guarantee that when one re-engages in "thinking," dialogue, and problem solving, that one will have a construct-aware appreciation of the indeterminacies and fallibilities of ideas. Those skills are built along related, but separate, channels. (We say a bit more about 5thPP below in the Deeper Dive box on The Unconscious.)

The 5thPP action logic "ups the game" of post-metaphysical thinking in the ways noted above. The "sources of indeterminacy" of reason and belief expand from reflecting on the truthfulness of claims to reflecting on the conceptualization of the objects within those truth-claims, including the object called the self. So far, we have given a rather philosophical explanation of 5thPP. But we can also look to science for justifications for 5thPP insights into the nature of self and language. Since our inquiry is into post-metaphysics, we emphasize the study of concept-formation rather than ego-formation. Though outside our scope, the curious reader can find many scientific studies informing the emerging understanding of how the self is composed and constructed (e.g. Thompson, 2014; Yaden et al., 2017; Morin, 2006; Davidson et al., 2012).

Deeper Dive: **Angels and other supranormal entities**

What about angels, aliens, channeled entities, spirits, ghosts, and life after death? – Are they real?

For many modern spiritual "seekers" and spiritual "listeners" the topic of supranormal beings is an important element of spiritual-but-not-religious discourse. And it is a rich topic for metaphysical and post-metaphysical consideration. I count myself among those who have had a few encounters with such beings (or "beings"), both as an internal experience and through an intermediary who claimed to be in

contact with such beings. If you travel within the circles that I do (and also within other cultural "bubbles"), it is not easy to cavalierly write off some of these experiences.

Are angels, aliens, channeled entities, and spirits real? I don't know. I know that I don't know. I think that "we" don't know. And I believe that nobody can say for sure one way or the other. So I believe that "I don't know" is the most accurate answer to the question. But let's not stop there. There is much we can learn by investigating this fertile field of knowing and non-knowing. (BTW, this may imply that any "I know" with great certainty *may* be the *least* accurate possible answer one could give.)

As in other "application areas" of post-metaphysical thinking, I will not discuss the specifics of the various themes of supranormal (supernatural, paranormal) entities – each being an entire field of its own (in history, culture, pseudo-science, and sometimes in scientific study). We can speak of them together because they share the same positioning from a post-metaphysical stance.

Most would agree that encounters with supranormal beings, especially those experienced internally, involve some sort of contact with one's *unconscious* mind (which may or may not be associated with a "collective unconscious" – see the Deeper Dive on that topic). Where people differ is on whether the unconscious mind can act as a portal to or intermediary with non-ordinary realms of existence. That is: a primary point of contention or clarification is whether supranormal entities are sourced in (1) the individual unconscious (subjective reality); (2) a collective unconscious (intersubjective reality); or (3) an actual autonomous other "consciousness" (objective reality) (– or some combination of these three).

Encounters with supranormal entities are well known to happen through contemplative or trance states, consuming entheogens, or other altered or liminal states of consciousness such as hypnogogic (dream-like) states; or second-hand through encounters with shamanistic individuals who may themselves be in such states. The question of whether these experiences are completely subjective fabrications of the mind (or hoaxes) is complicated by many reports of people receiving information that one "should not be able to know" or that seem magically corroborated between more than one person. In addition, aside from the widespread anecdotal stories, there are empirical studies on these and other paranormal phenomena that give some people enough evidence to believe that they are scientifically demonstrated (Murphy, 1992).

However, due to (1) the comparable bulk of empirical evidence suggesting the opposite, i.e. that each such phenomena are not "real", and (2) the fact that, even in scientific areas such as climate science and medicine, the validity of the scientific method itself (as practiced) is quite complicated – I will not here take sides on the general question of empirical proof, as I have other points to make. Many have their minds made up on either side of the question of whether supranormal entities are real – and pointers to empirical or logical arguments are all too easy to counter with alternative empirical or logical arguments (e.g. see Schwartz & Simon, 2002; McCann & David, 2018). The audience I write for here are those who want to engage in the delicate balancing act of respecting that *something* seems true and real about encounters with supranormal beings, while engaging both an open mind and the rational mind.

First, to those having experiences of supranormal entities, the *experiences* are very real; and quite often the sense that one is in contact with another being *feels extremely* real. Second, many of those who believe in supranormal entities are intelligent, rational, and psychologically mature and healthy. Third many who believe that they have had experiences with supranormal entities are interpreting those experiences in ways that seem to add significant value and meaning to their lives and the lives of others, in ways that do not seem to pose perceptible or significant harm.

Perhaps the question then is "why does it matter" what anyone believes? The better question is "*how* does it matter?" – and for that we can take a developmental approach. Here again, the question is one of coordinating different action logics (a 4thPP skill).

Defenders of the reality of supranormal beings tend to point to their positive manifestations (especially in New Age circles); and critics of the idea like to point to the downside of "superstition," including how irrational beliefs lead to irrational behaviors. Of course both are partially correct. We have discussed the vitalizing importance of the magical strata of consciousness, and also how allowing the magical strata to gain control of one's belief's and actions can be problematic, even dangerous. Proponents of supranormal entities would not agree that they are "simply" products of the magical mind, but they often describe the communication between such entities and humans as being *through* the unconscious, magical, dream-state, or pre-language layers of the mind. Therefor the same precautions about the pre-rational strata of consciousness can be applied.

A primary principle, articulated explicitly here but also held implicitly by many, is that (a healthy manifestation of) each strata of mind should maintain its proper *hierarchical* relationship with the others. Lower layers provide raw information, life energy, and meaning to higher layers; and higher layers sense/monitor and coordinate/regulate lower layers. Each higher layer, from magical to mythical to rational to trans-rational, should be able to (in an ideal healthy mind) "make the call" about trusting and using what the lower layer(s) are "saying."

For example, if one experiences a non-ordinary being telling or showing one something – in a dream, a trance, a psychedelic trip, etc. – the (1stPP) perception of that being and their emotional intention is *interpreted* by the (2ndPP) narrative mind, which casts the message in some larger context or story. And the (3rdPP) rational mind can decide whether that being and that story should be ignored, down-played, or re-interpreted. Likewise, 4thPP mind can judge whether the rational mind has not over-functioned and quashed beneficial life-force and psychic information from lower levels (as well as putting the whole system in a larger life context).

At each level the available complexity of intelligence can decide how to process information from the lower levels in such a way that it is beneficial to the overall wellbeing of the self. In a healthy psyche each level "knows how" to reject or re-interpret information for the good of the self, and each layer is set up to be able to do that with a bit more complexity and perspective than the prior. A *poorly* functioning psyche (unhealthy, at least in that moment) will make a bad decision for the larger self. It may let a dangerous or non-useful idea "in the door;" or fail to check the credentials or intentions of the (real or magical) supranormal being; or cast an otherwise positive idea with a hateful or demoralizing slant; or rationalize a story that is unworthy of keeping; or silence the rational mind to allow imagined daemons to become real.

This principle is valid *regardless* of one's metaphysical stance. Many already implicitly apply it. Open-minded skeptics will allow otherwise "rational" acquaintances to believe in supernatural beings as long as no harm is done. Those believers who regularly immerse themselves in contact with supranormal beings are discerning in their uptake of information from these sources. Both open-minded skeptics and reasonable believers are wary of those who seem psychologically compromised, naive, or narcissistic – it does not matter whether the supranormal experiences of those people are real or not, they should still be listened to at arms length if at all (and it may be more important to support their journey to psychic health or maturity than engage with their "story").

All of the above was written with an open mind about the possibility of supranormal beings communicating with humans – an openness I, for now, intend to maintain because it seem to supports a fuller experience of life. Yet below I share some thoughts that bring additional skepticism to such beliefs.

Here's the thing. We know that the unconscious mind can serve up astonishing material:

- In dreams we can have full hallucinations that are completely believed (within the dream).
- We have noted elsewhere how the brain sends anticipatory signals to the senses that can project expectations or imaginations onto sensory experience.
- Optical illusions and various types of perpetual distortions tell us that our senses can lie.
- In deep daydreaming or reverie memories and images can seem quite real.
- Psychedelic drugs, and psychotic mental conditions, can create full-blown hallucinations.
- It is quite common to hear voices in one's head (well, for me it is) – and sometimes these can command a special air of certainty or authoritative depth.
- Through special training, e.g. in Theravada kasina meditations, practitioners can develop the ability to hallucinate (e.g. see deities, or other forms) with eye wide open in the waking state.
- The creative imagination is ingenious. Crafters of stories and novels sometimes describe how narratives, detailed scenes, plotlines, personalities, and whole worlds just appear to them – gifted from the realms of the unconscious. Some authors describe a process of letting their characters come to life and tell the author what the character will say or do. For many artists, like mystics, the creative process is one of listening, not doing.

I am constantly amazed by the detail, scope, depth, and brilliance of what a good novelist can create. Some fictions contain, perhaps in coded or metaphorical terms, wisdom as deep as any sage (or spirit or alien) has said. Some authors and artists claim no authorship for their products, and attribute their creations to "the universe" or "collective consciousness." Likewise, the unconscious mind within *each of us* can serve up material of surprising detail, depth, and intelligence.

For someone with certain metaphysical assumptions about the world, it would not be difficult to imagine that messages from the unconscious, delivered through the daydream-like reverie of normal waking consciousness, or through the more dream-like states of trance or psychedelics that may include vivid visions – that these messages come, not simply from the individual unconscious, but are communications from a supernormal being. All that we know about how the "magical" strata of mind works, including its confounding of interior realities with exterior realities, supports a psychological explanation of such phenomena. However, for me, it does not explain (or "explain away") all of the anecdotal and scientific information that I am aware of. Thus: "I don't know."

Finally, in passing, I will say that the same analysis holds for the phenomena, popular in New Age and spiritual circles, of "synchronicities" (meaningful or magical coincidences), affirmations, distance healing, and "manifesting one's reality." Though close observation will show that much of what is reported under these phenomena are imagined (i.e. magical thinking), there is sufficient empirical and scholarly work to give believers some purchase. Our point here again, that the above analysis gives the scientifically minded and the spiritually minded some room for respectful dialogue.

Embodied Realism and Metaphorical Pluralism

Metaphysics and the embodied mind. We will focus on the work of George Lakoff and colleagues, whose scientific investigation into concept formation has profound implications for all of philosophy and spirituality, and for reason itself. In *Philosophy in the Flesh: the Embodied Mind & its Challenge to Western Thought,* Lakoff and Johnson (1999) make the radical claim that "the question of what we take truth to be is ... a matter for cognitive science because it depends on the nature of human understanding ... Truth is, for this reason, not something subject to definition by

an a-priori philosophy" (p. 108). The implications of Lakoff and Johnson's "Embodied Realism" are important because, as they put it: "radical change in our understanding of reason [leads to] a radical change in our understanding of ourselves" (p. 3). Lakoff and Johnson go on to say that "More than two millennia of a-priori philosophical speculations about [the nature of] of reason are over," and that because "findings from the science of the mind are inconsistent with central parts of Western philosophy … philosophy can never be the same again" (p. 4). We can add: nor can spirituality ever be the same again.

Lakoff and Johnson mount a full-frontal attack on the long tradition, within philosophy and "scientific realism," of using reason alone to reveal the essential nature of reality. In so doing they implicate modernity's (3rdPP) predominant mode of reasoning (in addition to metaphysical religious arguments based on logical inference). They describe traditional "disembodied objective scientific realism" as containing three claims or assumptions (p. 90): (1) there is a world independent of our understanding of it; (2) we can have stable (practical, trustable) knowledge of it; and (3) our concepts and forms of reason are *not* constrained by physicality, allowing science to discover absolute truths. They take the first two as true – while the goal of their book is to rebuke the third claim.

This territory is already familiar to us. The first two claims were echoed in our discussion of ontology, where we said that it is a performative contradiction to reject the assumptions that reality is objectively real, structured, and partly comprehensible – i.e. if we are "serious" we have no choice but to accept these "truths." For example, as Lakoff & Johnson put it, though all knowledge is fallible and provisional "we are not likely to discover that there are no such things as cells or that DNA does not have a double-helix structure" (p. 89). The third claim injects the epistemological principle that human understanding cannot produce absolute truths. Thus their argument parallels our description of post-metaphysics, but the "embodied" path they take to their conclusions, based on scientific findings, provides fresh insights and deeper grounding for the conclusions we have already reached, and thus provides additional support for post-metaphysical thinking.

Lakoff and Johnson describe the *three major findings of cognitive science* this way (p. 3-4): (1) the mind is inherently embodied; (2) thought is mostly unconscious; and (3) abstract concepts are largely metaphorical, with the third of these being the focus of their contribution. As to the first of these, this is implied in our notion that truth claims are "by someone from somewhere," and key strains of research and theory on embodied cognition were mentioned in the section on "A Brief History of Belief Fallibility." We have also already implied the second of these findings in our discussions of how the magical and mythic structures of the mind, as *unconscious substrates* for conscious reasoning, influence thought and belief (and see the Deeper Dive on the unconscious). We also began an inquiry into the third finding on the nature of abstract concepts – an inquiry that Lakoff and Johnson will help us deepen.

Lakoff and Johnson are telling us that the understanding of human reason underpinning classical philosophy is deeply flawed, and thus so are many of its methods and conclusions. Later we will apply their findings to *spiritual* concepts and beliefs as well. They continue by saying (p. 4-8, emphasis added):

– "Reason is *not disembodied* [but] arises from the nature of our brains, bodies, and bodily experience [such that] every structure of reason … comes from the details of our embodiment, [from] the same neural and cognitive mechanisms that allow us to perceive and move around ... There is no Cartesian dualistic person with a mind separate and independent from a body."
– "Reason is *evolutionary* ... [it builds upon forms present in] 'lower animals' … reason makes use of, rather than transcends, our animal nature...Reason is not dispassionate, but *emotionally engaged*."
– "Reason is *not 'universal'* in the transcendent sense; that is, it is not part of the structure of the universe. It is [however] a structure shared universally by all human beings." "Phenomenological *introspection alone [can not] discover* everything there is to know about the mind."
– "Since reason is shaped by the body, it is *not radically free* [and] we have no absolute freedom in Kant's sense … no full autonomy." "The utilitarian [rational fully autonomous] person [posited by economists] does not exist."
– And, to the post-modernists: "There is no … decentered subjective … poststructuralist person … for whom all meaning is arbitrary, totally relative, and purely historically contingent, unconstrained by body and brain."

We might also suggest that spirit, soul, consciousness, and divinity, similarly: are not disembodied, are entangled with emotions and cultural contexts, are evolutionary, are not completely transcendent or metaphysically universal, and can not be understood through individual introspection alone.

We began this text with Exhibit A, which illustrated spiritual teachers making claims about Consciousness, God, Soul, Spirit, the Universe or Cosmos, Nature, Reality, the Non-Dual, and the Source or Ground of Being – using descriptors including absolute, ultimate, infinite, supreme, essential, fundamental, limitless, eternal, unmanifest, ever-present, unbounded, formless, perfect, and universal. Such ideas are appealing and powerful in part because they address questions of ultimate concern in ways that can activate the entire "stack" of developmental action logics alive in contemporary culture. They tap into the 1stPP and 2ndPP magical and mythical modes of meaning making that 4thPP aims to re-integrate into consciousness. They use 3rdPP levels of abstraction to lift the spirit into sublime realms, and 3rdPP logical arguments to posit an Ultimate or Non-Dual Reality that seemingly releases spiritual claims from scientific scrutiny.

But, as Lakoff and Johnson make clear, absolutist and externalist spiritual claims cannot withstand an embodied world-view. Our goal has been to help the essential insights and modes of Being testified by our spiritual teachers to survive contemporary rigors and critiques. Lakoff and Johnson's Embodied Realism deconstructs spiritual metaphysics, spiritual truths, spiritual narratives, and spiritual logics by exposing indeterminacies at the fundamental level of language, concepts, and physicality. It forces us to re-craft spiritual metaphysics as resting on a real-istic substrate, and in so doing helps motivate an *embodied* vision of a post-metaphysical spirituality of the future.

Graded concepts and Prototype Theory. We have already mentioned what I call the "symbolic impulse" – the tendency of the mind to use conceptual categories that split the world

into parts while joining parts into categories (e.g. the concept "spiritual" separates spiritual from non-spiritual things and joins things thought to be spiritual). When one employs the knife-and-glue of the concept, important truths and nuances can get left on the cutting room floor, so to speak, as those troublesome grey areas are ignored. There is something deep and strong within cognition that wants to treat abstract concepts (e.g. ego, compassion, evolution, Eros, subjectivity, democracy, free will) as if they are well-defined boxes that things fall within or outside of – but this is almost never the case. As Gregory Bateson says: "[the] world begins by making splits, then drawing boundaries, then solidifying these boundaries. Then we fool ourselves into believing what we have made ourselves see. Solidifying boundaries is very comfortable, because it allows us to deny our experience...We miss the whole system" (1978, p. 44). With each split-and-join operation we risk making two types of errors: overgeneralization and overspecialization, i.e. treating things as similar that are in some important way different, and treating things as different that are in some important way similar (analogous to Type I and Type II errors from statistical analysis).

"Prototype Theory" in cognitive science has revealed how the nature of concepts differs from what we normally assume about them (Mervis & Rosch, 1981; Lakoff, 1987). *All* concepts – not just poorly defined, culturally relevant, or complex ones – have "graded" or indeterminate boundaries (though some are more indeterminate than others). Conceptual categories universally admit to fuzzy boundaries as an outcome of how cognition works. One can make efforts to define concepts more clearly, yet specifying exactly what sits at the blurry edges of conceptual boundaries will vary in each context, and the indeterminacy itself is a universal cognitive phenomenon.

Many academic authors bemoan, in their introductory paragraphs, that one of the problems needing to be addressed in their field is insufficient agreement or excessive ambiguity. As Michael Shermer puts it, scholarship is "notoriously fraught with definitional disagreements" (2011, p. 53). What Descartes said four centuries ago is still true: "[philosophy] has been cultivated for many centuries by the best minds that have ever lived and that nevertheless no single thing is to be found in it which is not a subject of dispute and in consequence is not dubious" (1637, p. 10). Descartes was *not* a post-metaphysical thinker, however, because he believed that he had discovered a theory not subject to this dilemma – he did not count himself among the philosophers plagued by knowledge indeterminacy. A 4thPP/5thPP approach takes indeterminacy as a given in embodied human reason – something to be managed or embraced, but not overcome. The indeterminacy of concepts suggests humility but need not lead to an impasse. Along similar lines is Rowson's quote above: "Spirituality needs definition, but it doesn't need a definition" (2014, p. 28).

Concepts are grounded in memory structures built upon actual *exemplars* observed in the past, and noting specific (real or hypothetical) exemplars is a necessary step in explaining, arguing for, or explicitly modifying, any concept definition (Elster, 1999; Lakatos, 1976; Mervis & Rosh, 1981). Research in Prototype Theory shows that some conceptual exemplars are more central than others, where the most central are called "prototypes" of the concept. The traditional logic-based notion of concepts from Aristotelian Logics, based on necessary and sufficient conditions, does not match well to actual human cognition. One can usually imagine things that exist in the gray area between being X and not-X – things that are *sort-of* X or *more-or-less* X.

Lakoff and Johnson describe how graded concepts lead to graded *propositions* that "...contain linear scales [that] define the degree to which a given property holds" (p. 288). Graded concept

boundaries make universalizing claims of the form "*all* X's are Y" particularly fallible, because there will always be examples of things that are not exactly X but not exactly not-X either. It would be more correct to say "all X's are Y *to the extent that* instances of X and Y are prototypical of the categories as the speaker intends them." Disagreements about whether "all X's are Y" will often hinge on the fact that the objects offered up as exemplars may not be included in both party's meaning of X or Y. In a tense argument over whether animals have "language," parties may actually agree on the behavioral facts, and just disagree on which behaviors count within the definition of "language." A lot of energy can be wasted over unexplored definitional differences. The cognitive science behind concept formation therefor supports our earlier notion of the "in a sense..." attitude to collective meaning-making, which advocates considering the range of meanings (or exemplars) that different interlocutors may be implying (i.e. "interpretive pluralism").

In the Deeper Dive on "Faux dualities and paradoxes" we described how the symbolic impulse can trick conception and perception into organizing the world into tidy categories, manufacturing fake dualities and paradoxes. We mentioned mundane dualisms – fruit/vegetable, liberal/conservative, wave/particle, love/hate, male/female, nature/nurture, thinking/feeling; and dualisms entangled in spiritual and philosophical discourse – good/evil, saint/sinner, dark/light, spirit/matter, mind/body, interior/exterior, individual/collective, state/stage, empty/full, absolute/relative, self/selfless, and being/non-being. Lakoff's Embodied Realism, based on solid science, is a kind of proof that all such dualisms are misleading, and not representative of reality.

Often, we realize that reality is not so simple, and use language (e.g. with qualifiers and hedges) to compensate for the distortions introduced by sharp categorical edges – but the underlying pull of the symbolic impulse remains, even if subtle and tamed. Sophisticated modern thinkers are well familiar with the idea that sharp categories are problematic, but fully applying or embodying this principle is rare – our words and actions belie a deeper "belief" that the categories and dualities are real.

We noted, as has been said by many, that the false conceptual battle lines carved into human consciousness can create confusion, enslavement, and suffering. Paul Marshal describes this as the "pathology of the paradigm of simplicity [of] Cartesian clear and distinct ideas, analytical reductionism of whole into parts, and isolation of objects from their environmental contexts" (2012, p. 21). Living beyond this pathology is part of what is entailed by 5thPP consciousness.

As Cook-Greuter notes, one can achieve an understanding of thought and language that readily perceives these "pitfalls" and "absurdities," and witnesses the creation of boundaries and dualities. This construct aware skill includes interpreting categories more flexibly as having graded (or more complex) boundaries that can shift without notice, as Lakoff's work shows is the case. It also includes having a meta-cognitive sense for how concept meanings depend on the exemplars that come to mind in a given context. One can generously give examples and ask others for clarifying examples. Construct-aware understanding includes noticing how concepts co-define each other. In the Buddhist tradition this is related to the ideas of emptiness and "dependent origination" (or co-dependent arising).

Dependent origination has (at least) two senses – and both implicate a 5thPP view of reality. (Developmentally, 5thPP involves an immediate and visceral perception of this principle, while an intellectual understanding of it may start at late 3rdPP and mature in 4thPP.) One sense is the ontological understanding that the existence and nature of any object has been conditioned upon the existence and nature of many other objects. One can extend this idea recursively to see that, in a sense, all objects are intertwined – emerging and evolving within a vast network of co-arising entities. In this sense, the perception of something as an individual separate object is an illusion hiding the fact that it is intimately connected with, theoretically, "all" of reality. Objects are "empty" of the solid reality they seem to have. Another route to this emptiness is through the scientific understanding that, at the level of atoms or subatomic particles or string theory, we see that solid objects are mostly space, or made of energy rather than matter, or made of nothing but information or differences.

The other sense of dependent origination is epistemological. Within our perception and conception of the word, each object arises in relationship to many others. Again, the perception/conception of an object being separate and individual is an illusion, hiding the fact that we understand it only in relationship with, theoretically, everything else in consciousness. Our perceptions and conceptions are thus said to be empty. Not because there is nothing there, like a blank slate, but because how things *appear* is empty of objective truth.

Ego and abstract concepts. The symbolic impulse interacts strongly with the egoic impulse. It seems that for ideas and concepts that one is more "attached" to, conceptual boundaries tighten, appearing more distinct and certain. As we have noted, demi-reality is not only about what one believes, but also about the certainty and importance with which one holds beliefs. The emotions that arise when the sense of self is threatened interact with an "amygdala hijacking" process in the brain, and thought becomes less flexible. We have noted that more *abstract* concepts can take on more meaningfulness, and become more attached to egoic functioning. Unfortunately, it appears that the ideas most important to us are the most difficult to gain perspective on – the most difficult to see as indeterminate, co-arising, empty, soft-boundaried, etc.

Lakoff and colleagues' research on conceptual structures provides scientific evidence for what we have argued for philosophically. The indeterminacy of concepts becomes progressively worse the more *abstract* they are, i.e. the further removed from concrete sensory experiences and exemplars. We noted that abstractions can implicitly confer false properties onto objects, and that indeterminacy in concept definitions leads to indeterminacy in statements (truth claims). Chris Argyris, a well-known theorist in the field of "learning organizations" says: "The likelihood of differences in the interpretations of different observers increases the higher one goes on the ladder of inference" (1995, p 58) – which is closely related to the ladder of abstraction. Carolan (2004) uses the term "epistemological distance" to describe this phenomenon. Rungs along the ladder of epistemological distance are steps of increased abstraction, inference, or contingency that lead one ever further from simple concrete reality (or "facts").

Thus, the useful purity of the abstraction can become the totalizing cognitive hegemony, or the "repressive metaphysical projection" of the ideal entity or the ideological vision (what Marshall calls the grandiose "pathology of the paradigm of simplicity...").

We have discussed some of the most abstract concepts in spirituality and metaphysics. We quoted Habermas with "the One and the Many, unity and plurality, designates the theme that has governed metaphysics from its inception [as far back as Plato]" (1996. p. 115). We noted how metaphysical thinking is a movement of mystical thinking into a greater abstraction, with Russell characterizing it as indicating an "uncreated, indestructible, unchanging, indivisible" nature that is beyond time and space. "Absolute" (vs. relative) Truth or Reality incurs the problems of highly abstract ideals, as does the concept of non-duality and any abstract totalizing or essentialist concept. God, especially if taken as a metaphysical abstraction rather than a literal being, is a highly abstract concept.

As to "What is the good?", one of the most important metaphysical questions of philosophy and human "ultimate concern," Lakoff's answer might be simple: it is simply a word – an abstract concept that we have invented, and which has no meaning independent of our deliberations. Of course, this partial answer does not satisfy the essential question of how humans define, work towards, and negotiate the good, but it does help us take a productively post-metaphysical approach to the inquiry. What Embodied Realism tells us is simply to approach such ideas and ideals with a humility and humor appropriate to their indeterminacy.

Metaphorical pluralism. Lakoff and Johnson's theory contains one important insight we have yet to disclose. If the reader is finding our dismantling of conceptual categories fascinating or unsettling, then things are about to get a bit more fascinating or unsettling. Thus far Embodied Realism has given scientific evidence that challenges what we could call the "simple" mental model of tidy conceptual categories, and exposed how conceptual boundaries are graded or fuzzy (abstract concepts being more problematic), and dependent on exemplars (in particular prototypical exemplars). Lakoff and Johnson further show how abstract concepts have even more complex and deeply problematic natures because they are "metaphorical pluralisms."

The reader is likely to be familiar with the notion that much of language and thought is metaphorical. Lakoff and Johnson argue that thought and reason are *primarily* and *fundamentally* metaphorical, and that the metaphors we employ are grounded in our embodiment – i.e., that abstract thought is composed of conceptual building blocks at the sensory-motor level.

Of course, there are an infinite number of potential variations built up from any set of primitive building blocks – so metaphorical pluralism shows how thought is *limited* in the sense of being constructed from particular parts, while it remains virtually unlimited in the sense of the number of permutations of those parts. The key point for us is the (perhaps exaggerated) conclusion that if it can't be built up from basic sensory-motor primitives, *we can't think it*. Our embodied experience determines the limited conceptual pallet that we have at our disposal with which to paint all of our ideas (a pallet determined both by the genetically established structure of the brain and the embodied experiences of early childhood cognitive development).

Developmental theories (Piaget, 1972; Fischer 1980; Commons 1984; Kegan, 1994) show us how mental constructs are built up from lower level constructs, in response to interaction with and pressures from the environment. With each construct building upon priors, all thought and belief ultimately grounds in sensory-motor foundations (plus the pre-given cognitive processes of the brain, such as attention and memory).

Lakoff and Johnson show how all abstract concepts "such as importance, similarity, difficulty, and morality," and our abstract understanding of subjective experiences such as "desire, affection, intimacy, and achievement," are based upon concrete metaphors (p. 45). "As rich as these experiences are, much of the way we conceptualize them, reason about them, and visualize them come from [concrete, mostly sensory-motor] domains of experience" (p. 45). For example, our understanding of friendship or intimacy is not simply *related* to experiences and concepts of closeness, warmth, smiling, touch, and satisfying conversation, in a sense it *is* the combination of such things and nothing more.

One can think of the abstract concept as the node in a semantic network that has no content in itself, but serves as the connection point pulling together other nodes (which, according to Lakoff and Johnson, bottom out in concrete experiential categories). This connection between abstract thought and concrete experience is at the center of Lakoff and Johnson's "Primary Theory of Metaphor." In their theory "metaphor is *not* the result of...interpretation [it is] a matter of immediate conceptual mapping via neural connections" (emphasis in original; p. 57). (Non-abstract or literal ideas need not be metaphorical; grasping a hammer is literal, while grasping an idea is metaphorical.)

Lakoff and Johnson map out the sensory-motor roots of many abstract concepts. I list some of them below. The first concept in each list is abstract and the second shows one of its concrete metaphorical groundings: *importance* as bigness, *happy* as up, *bad* as stinky, *difficulties* as heavy burdens, *more* as up, *relationships* as enclosures, and *organization* as physical structure (PITF, p. 50-54). Additional concepts that are more relevant to our spiritual and philosophical inquiry include: *knowing* or understanding as seeing or grasping, *similarity* as closeness, *time* as motion, *change* or transformation as motion, *states* as locations, *purpose* as destinations or desired objects, and *causes* as physical forces.

The metaphorical connections between abstract ideas and concrete metaphors are not always simple or obvious. Primary metaphors are combined in complex ways. For example, Lakoff and Johnson examine the "life as a journey" metaphor and uncover a plethora of metaphorical interpretations. Another example is importance, which is metaphorically associated with bigness and other sensory-motor metaphors.

Lakoff and Johnson's *Philosophy in the Flesh* is not only about the pervasive role of metaphor in reason and language (their prior books *Women, fire, and dangerous things*, Lakoff 1987; and *Metaphors we live by*, Lakoff and Johnson 1980, covered that territory). They have bigger fish to fry. They are out to show how the most prestigious of all ideas and theories, philosophical and scientific ones, which are also among the most abstract ideas and theories, are on dubious ground. "Our most fundamental concepts – time, events, causation, the mind, the self, and morality – are multiply metaphorical" (or metaphorically pluralistic, p. 128). It shows that abstract ideas point not out to eternal truths but back to concrete embodied experience. Metaphysical philosophical arguments seem to be telling us more about human understanding than the cosmos.

In one sense, scholars are well aware of the definitional pluralism of concepts. Scholars have written entire books exploring single constructs such as cosmopolitanism, hope, patriotism, being, the self, care, bullshit, or insecurity (this random list is just from scanning the bookshelf to my

left). But metaphorical pluralism strikes deeper than the understandings of definitional indeterminacy or the metaphorical linguistic relationships.

Time and causality. We can now relate these ideas to ontological questions in philosophy (and later, spirituality). Lakoff and Johnson show that many abstract concepts are understood in terms of a "metaphorical patchwork, sometimes conceptualized by one metaphor, and at other times by another." For example, consider our concept of time, which is based on a patchwork conglomerate of more fundamental experiences and schema, mostly involving space and motion. The future is in *front* of us and the past is *behind* us. We *face* the future. Time *passes* by or the time has *arrived*. Time durations can be *large* or *small*. One date is *close* to another. Events occur *at* times or *in* time. Also mentioned is the "time as a resource" metaphor – we can waste time, steal time, budget our time, etc. (These examples are for English language speakers, but the authors give interesting examples of alternative conceptualizations from other languages and cultures.)

These metaphors "structure not only the way we conceptualize the relationship between events and time but the very way we experience time" (p. 153). "We have found that we cannot think (much less talk) about time without those metaphors" (p 166). Thus "the metaphorical conceptualization of time is constitutive, at least in significant part, of our concept of time"(p. 166). That is, the metaphors are not just *an aspect* of our understanding of time, but together they *are* our understanding of time.

Lakoff and Johnson go on to "consider the classical ontological question: *Does time exist independent of minds*, and if so, what are its properties? [We] reject the question. It is a loaded question" (p. 167). In other words, answers to the question are meaningless or not useful. "Yet the biological and cognitive construction of time does not make it subjective or arbitrary or merely cultural...the metaphors are not arbitrary; they are deeply motivated. They permit the measurement of time, our very notion of history, the science of physics, and much more" (p. 168). The metaphors are "apt" and extremely useful, but "being metaphors, can get us into silliness if we take them literally." And, reading Lakoff and Johnson, there seems to be much of such silliness in classical philosophy.

Importantly, the metaphors that underlie a particular concept can be incompatible or contradictory, and yet we unreflectively jump from one metaphorical basis to another. For example, on the nature of *causality* Lakoff and Johnson's analysis shows that "over the course of history, philosophers have formulated a wide variety of theories of causation, each substantively different from the others and therefore each with its own distinct logic" (p. 173). Are they talking about the same thing? "Philosophers may disagree as to what is the *right* theory of causation, but the philosophical community recognizes all of them as theories of the same thing. Why should philosophers have come up with this particular range of theories of causation?" We will never answer this question if we only keep looking "out there" to the external world of physics for the real answer. The answer is revealed only when we acknowledge the embodied metaphorical nature of the concept itself.

Like the concepts of chair and game (try to define them!), the concept of *causation* is understood in terms of a loose collection of features and exemplars having a fuzzy "family resemblance" or "multivalent radial structure" but having no precise definition, specific nature or essence beyond

human cogitation. Though having diverse senses, these concepts have an undeniable unity. The various senses of the word have enough overlap of use and understanding that the mishmash holds together as a single conceptual gestalt for us most of the time.

Other metaphorical pluralisms. Lakoff and Johnson continue with an in-depth analysis of constructs more central to spirituality. They elaborate on *mind, consciousness, self*, *free will, object, truth,* and *reality* and identify the metaphorical pluralisms of each. Above we noted that because all such abstract concepts are graded, metaphorical pluralisms, and/or otherwise indeterminate, that any *claims* containing them are likewise fallible.

Many classic philosophical and academic debates lose much of their steam in the light of Embodied Realism. Do slugs have *emotions*? Are dolphins *intelligent*? Are computers intelligent (could they become so)? Do apes use *language*? Are rocks or trees or atoms *conscious*? Do humans have *free will*? Do we have a *soul*? Heated arguments ensue without a thorough investigation into how each party's interpretation of abstract concepts may differ.

Slugs, dolphins, apes, computers, rocks, atoms and people do what they are observed to do, and scientists can propose deeper mechanisms that predict or explain phenomena. But the yes-or-no categorical types of questions are uninteresting in the light of Embodied Realism. Humans have free will in a sense and they don't in another sense (arguments on both sides are no doubt familiar to the reader). Dolphins are intelligent depending on the central exemplars and metaphors that are built into one's meaning of intelligent (this does not mean that it is useless to study dolphin intelligence). Is moral development justice-based, as Kohlberg found, or care-base, as Gilliam found? Both types of phenomena are observed and there are important questions of how/when/why/who to be investigated, but whether moral development "is" categorically this-or-that is not among them.

Deeper Dive: More metaphorical pluralisms

We mentioned that Kirkham wrote an entire book and the meanings of Truth used by philosophers. The oft-cited definition of knowledge as "justified true belief" is condemned to indeterminacy by metaphorical pluralism. Philosophers who argue about this definition of knowledge never seem to agree on the definitions (or prototypical exemplars) of "justified," "true," or "belief" (see Gettier, 1963).

Even the verb "to be" is a metaphorical pluralism. According to Lakoff and Johnson, it can imply identity, class membership, existence, or predication. (President Clinton famously and disastrously said, as he was trying to deceive his interrogators: "It depends on what the meaning of the word 'is' is...") Alfred Korzybski describes E-Prime, "a version of the English language that excludes all forms of the verb to be [as a] device to clarify thinking and strengthen writing [that] leads to a less dogmatic style of language that reduces the possibility of misunderstanding and conflict…For example, the sentence 'the film was good' could translate into E-Prime as 'I liked the film' or as 'the film made me laugh.' The E-Prime versions communicate the speaker's experience rather than judgment, making it harder for the writer or reader to confuse opinion with fact" (Wikipedia August 20, 2018).

Similar to Lakoff, Esbjörn-Hargens (2010) proposes that many objects of deliberation are "decentered multiple objects" that exhibit an "ontological pluralism." That is, when interlocutors

(experts or citizens) talk about a complex object such as "climate change," they are often referring to different aspects of the totality of the hyper-object.

The theory of metaphorical pluralisms, backed up by research in cognitive science, along with the rest of Embodied Realism, should strike fear, or at least doubt, into the heart of many spiritual belief systems. Indeed, given what we now know about the mind, "philosophy can never be the same again," nor can spirituality or religion. Which is what we could expect and desire in a post-metaphysical milieu.

Epistemic Drives

From thinking to sensing. Gentle reader, if you are still with me, it is with delighted appreciation that I invite you to relax and take a deep breath, as we are rounding the last corners and the conclusion of our exploration is within sight. I started this text by describing how post-metaphysics refers to a humble and reflective *attitude* on truth and belief. It is about an orientation to knowledge, but therefore ultimately about the *relationship* between *self* and the world (and self and *others*). Here post-metaphysics joins arms with spirituality and ethics. With that deep breath I invite you to *sense into* the implications of the remaining discussion, and allow your, possibly tired, analytical mind to rest a little.

We have journeyed from a descriptive and heuristic narrative to a more logical and philosophical approach, then brought in cognitive psychology to help establish an embodied and more personal frame for post-metaphysical thinking. Next we will move into an even more intimate connection with the topic, by exploring the emotion-laden *experiential* aspects of thinking and being post-metaphysical. For in the end, post-metaphysical thinking is about *caring* enough about truth that one opens to the disconcerting "truths about truth;" and it is about caring enough about others that one is motivated to reduce the demi-realities in belief systems that cause suffering. We are enculturated within what Gebser calls a "deficient mental" mode of consciousness, in which demi-real metaphysical projections are deeply entrenched in the modern mind. This is why we have offered a wide variety of perspectives to triangulate upon an intellectual understanding of these phenomena. But in the end applying this meta-knowledge is more about attitude and sensing than about knowledge and theory.

We have used a developmental model to separate the magical, mythical, and rational layers of the mind that contribute in different ways to mystical, metaphysical, and spiritual thinking. Russell was quoted as saying that mystical wisdom is largely a "way of *feeling*" and an "attitude toward life, not...a creed about the world." At the 4thPP action logic one begins to perceive how emotion, ego, language, and reason interact in unhelpful ways, which can motivate deeper self-understanding. We have noted how egoic factors exacerbate demi-realities in thought, as in amplifying the contractive aspects of the symbolic impulse. Generally, stress, threat, complexity, or urgency can increase the ego's need for certainty – its avoidance of uncertainty. These factors can "downshift" cognition to more primitive levels and inhibit reflective meta-skills (though it is also true that challenges can motivate one to rise to the occasion). Similarly, we can hypothesize that cultivating trust, harmony, openness, care, and curiosity supports post-metaphysical thinking.

Epistemic drives. I use the term "epistemic drive" as an umbrella term for any tendency of thought that influences what is perceived as real or true. The term *drive* calls attention to the embodied felt-sense aspect of reason. We have already discussed several of these drives. The symbolic impulse (with all of its subparts, e.g. the tendency to conceptualize in terms of dualities) is an epistemic drive, as is the egoic drive to identify with and tightly clutch one's beliefs. The drives to make meaning, find patterns ("patternicity"), and maintain certainty in the face of dissonance, uncertainty, and unknowing are also epistemic drives. In our descriptions of magical, mythical, and rational thinking one can identify many emotion-like impulses that influence thought and belief formation.

Table 1. Metaphysical and balancing drives.

Metaphysical drives (toward...)	*Balancing drives (toward...)*
Abstraction (ideals, transcendence)	Concreteness (tangible, sensory, immanent)
Generalization	Specialization (the specific, details)
Integration (wholes, holism)	Differentiation (parts)
Universal (totalizing, absolute)	Relative or contextual
Fundamental (essential, central)	Consequential (peripheral or subordinate)
Permanence (predictability)	Change (transient, unpredictable, chaotic)
Simplicity (clarity)	Complexity
Unity/The One (singularity)	Multiplicity (the many)
Complete (comprehensive; total; systemic)	Partiality (deconstruction, liminality, mystery)
Similarity	Difference (diversity)
Perfection, purity	Imperfection, grittiness
Certainty (confirmation bias)	Novelty, surprise, open to the unknown
Uniqueness, specialness	Ordinariness (commonality)

Epistemic drives are analogous to biologically innate "emotional" drives, e.g. the drive to reproduce, the fight/flight/freeze responses, territoriality, maternal/paternal care, and social dominance/submissiveness drives – but would seem to involve higher brain centers. As some readers will notice, my framing of epistemic drives is related to some "cognitive biases" and "logical fallacies" (see Kahneman et al., 1982; Shermer, 2011; and Wikipedia contains excellent summaries of these); and is also related to some psychological "archetypes" and "personality types" that implicate styles of thinking. The usual treatment of cognitive biases emphasizes the *results* of fallible cognition and the shape of systematic distortions in beliefs. My use of epistemic drives emphasizes the *impulse* or motivation that draws one into enacting these distortions. The goal is to support a reflective perception of when these drives are active in any moment. (Note that, though cognitive biases have been researched extensively, as have the epistemic drives described in Lakoff's work, our treatment of epistemic drives rests on common-sense arguments rather than science.)

A plethora of drives or hard-wired urges exist within humans, mostly dormant until conditions trigger them, and often operating in competition (will I fight or run? Eat, work, or play?). Like other drives, epistemic drives are pervasive unconscious processes that, on the one hand, can have

unseen control over us, and on the other hand, can be observed and managed through learned metacognitive (or meta-emotional) skills. As with biological drives to eat (or over-eat), sexually flirt, protect territory, etc., our lives are improved when we reach a stage of development in which we are aware of, and can control or compensate for, these impulses (i.e., when "subject becomes object" for any given drive).

As with biological drives, one never completely outgrows or eliminate epistemic drives; since they can raise their heads unexpectedly in some contexts, and can operate in surprisingly subtle ways. This calls for attentiveness and responsiveness. One becomes aware of and learns to manage them at ever deeper and more nuanced levels – the developmental learning process continues indefinitely. As was clear in the discussion of mystical and metaphysical thinking, epistemic drives are as active and forceful in leaders, mystics, and geniuses as they are in the rest of us.

In our list of epistemic drives those listed as "metaphysical drives" seem to be most related to what motivates metaphysical thinking as we have described it. I suggest that each drive is balanced by a contrasting drive (or, more accurately, is balanced by a set or "ecology " of other drives), as is the case with many biological drives. For example, biologically we have drives for fight vs. flight, action vs. rest, taking vs. giving, etc. In our discussions of metaphysical thinking we have emphasized drives including abstraction, certainty, and unity, suggesting that these drives sometimes overreach – but surely the mind has balancing instincts and needs, for example toward the concrete, the novel, and the diverse. Each individual will manifest a different composition of more active (or habitual) and less active drives, and we suggest, quite tentatively, that the drives listed in the metaphysical drives column characterize what draws one toward metaphysical thinking.

Clearly these "drives" are not psychologically separate – they overlap quite a bit. For example, the symbolic impulse is aligned with drives toward abstraction, generalization, simplicity, unity, and certainty (among others). The general "meaning making" drive relates to many of the metaphysical drives as well. Perhaps a small set of foundational drives would provide an adequate theoretical pallet to cover them all – I have not attempted to produce one. My goal here is to illustrate the scope of these drives rather than provide a definitive taxonomy or theory (in fact, Embodied Realism explains why a tidy set of categories may be impossible).

Our list is suggestive rather than comprehensive. It would be possible to associate these drives with researched phenomena in cognitive biases or archetypes. There are no doubt correlations between the strength of certain epistemic drives and personality factors such as openness and conscientiousness – but exploring such theoretical connections is not relevant to our goal in this chapter of turning attention inward toward embodiment. The invitation here is simply to develop a capacity to feel into such drives rather than think about them – to experience the pull of these urges. If the reader feels a desire to transform this informal mishmash of overlapping concepts into a refined theory she will be moving in the opposite direction! But if you are draw to do that, don't despair – *pause* and *feel* the part of you that wants to do that.

One can become aware of that in the human mind which dearly wants to pull the disparate, the many, the diverse into a unifying whole; or achieve the simplicity and power of a general concept or rule; or rest in what is at the center of things (or underneath things). There is a sense of ease,

certainty, and mastery when one ignores details and differences and trusts a sturdy generality; a sense of elegance and wholeness when one embraces many things into a circle of unity. One obtains satisfaction from ordering things or collecting them into tidy groups. The inquisitive and meaning-hungry mind wants to know the causal root, foundation, source, or origin of things.

We do not imply that these tendencies of mind are fraudulent – we are suggesting an awareness of how and when they are active. Physicist/philosopher David Bohm called this self-perception capacity "proprioception of thought" – a term that metaphorically extends the body's ability to feel its own movements (proprioception) into an awareness of the movements of thought itself. He says "we could say that practically all the problems of the human race are due to the fact that thought is not [usually] proprioceptive" (Bohm, 1996, p. 25).

Science has shown incontrovertibly that the emotional and perceptual functions of the brain are inextricably linked to its rational functions (Damasio, 1999; Goleman, 1995). At 3rdPP consciousness, most individuals can clearly see how emotions influence actions and how emotions influence thought – e.g. one can notice how being frustrated about bad weather causes one to be impatient with family members; or how being enamored of a speaker can make one less likely to critique their ideas. The 4thPP/5thPP sensibilities that we are describing here are subtler. Though the experience may be somewhat different for each individual, thinking and questioning each *feel* like something different; as do focusing one's attention and widening it. I.E. there are felt-sense experiences that co-occur with the cognitive activities of intellectual reasoning. There are also felt-sense experiences associated with thinking in magical, mystical, or metaphysical modes of thought. Various aspects of what we could call *spiritual* thinking have felt-sense correlates as well. To notice that one might be thinking too abstractly, or one is grasping for too much certainty, or craving simplicity, or is coercing another into agreement, or is escaping into a magical fantasy world, or is leaving practical considerations behind at risk of a "spiritual bypass" – these types of awarenesses are more like emotional (meta-emotional) awareness than rational inferences.

Each epistemic drive serves a positive function in the overall goals of finding truths and making meaning in life. But they can also over-function to create biases, errors, and ethical problems. Phenomena such as grandiosity, hegemony, elitism, and proto-fascism are extreme cases. But in less extreme ways the subtle influence of such drives pervades the creation, consumption, and promotion of theories, models, and belief systems – including spiritual ones. In our narrative on "historical arcs" we imply that humanity needs to understand the mind better – to strengthen modes of awareness that can notice when the rational mind is over-reaching, and when other aspects of the mind are too weak. Awareness is the first step to adaptation. A proprioceptive sensitivity to the inner movements of epistemic drives is just that capacity. Post-metaphysical thinking necessarily includes a kind of post-metaphysical feeling/sensing.

Although in specific situations the "balancing drives" in the table can be overactive as well, in our exploration of metaphysical and post-metaphysical thinking we have emphasized the list of "metaphysical drives," as it seems that both modern Western culture and contemporary spirituality err too far in those directions. Strengthening the balancing drives, in individuals, contexts, or cultures, is one path to ameliorating these errors. The term "negative capability" mentioned above captures many of those balancing drives. And of course, cultivating basic human emotional

orientations such as humility, curiosity, generosity, compassion, and respect are powerful antidotes that would significantly support post-metaphysical thinking.

A complementary approach is to cultivate the habit of reflecting on one's *motivations* behind belief-formation or belief-propagation. The cognitive task of identifying what needs are being met – safety, comfort, solidarity, creativity, understanding, control, influence, service, etc. – is closely related to the felt-sense proprioception of thought. It must be admitted that these suggestions are mundane. Humility, self-understanding, service, compassion...nothing new there – yet they are in such short supply in the public sphere of belief-formation. Our explorations are meant to explain why they are difficult to embody in a complex world, and also help us manifest them more robustly.

A post-metaphysical spiritual *community* would also be a post-metaphysical *knowledge-building* community, and one of its characteristics would be sufficient trust and depth of self-reflection that members could question the epistemic drives (and the quasi-hidden motives) that might lie underneath their individual *and collective* beliefs and decision-making. Such communities can proclaim humility, curiosity, generosity, compassion, and respect as explicitly shared values.

Deeper Dive: Consciousness

Consciousness is a deep topic. Perhaps unnecessarily deep. Thinkers from experienced scientists to pub-pundits have ideas about what consciousness is. Consciousness has even been proposed as the fundamental substrate of existence. Some have tried to link consciousness to quantum entanglement and the collapse of the quantum wave function, but these are metaphorical, not scientific, associations. The dramatized educational video "Through the Wormhole: The Universe is Conscious" (at www.youtube.com/watch?v=lkdR_wXxjsw) says (at about 50 seconds) that that "we can change the way reality behaves just by looking at it" and that the famous Double-Slit Experiment "will make you question whether reality exists at all." Such statements are meant to activate the magical and mythical levels of meaning-making of the novice. They are both meaning-generative and troublesome for reasons we have discussed at length. From the post-metaphysical perspective presented in this text, one can make several observations about Consciousness:

- The "hard problem" of consciousness, i.e. how it is possible that dead matter can have feelings or sentience (and the related problem of how mind or consciousness can have an effect on matter; see Chalmers, 1996), is a non-question – a faux-paradox. The question is a child of the *symbolic impulse* creating a conceptual split between mind and matter, subject and object, which was taken up by Descartes and many following him. An *embodied* philosophy (or psychology or spirituality) assumes that mind and matter are intricately connected and co-emergent, and have never really been separate. The hard problem is no problem in this sense (and see Lakoff and Johnson, 1999).

- Consciousness, as understood by many, is a *misplaced concreteness*. There is no *thing or process* existing in the universe to be found that will explain all of what is loaded onto the word, though science continues to discover individual mechanisms that explain aspects of what it refers to. When the abstract concept "consciousness" is *reified* and projected out as a thing, it causes those hypnotized by its grandeur to go looking for "it," forgetting that, as an idea, it is a conceptual *tool* that we created in our attempt to explain a complex set of phenomena. This complex set of phenomena is real, but, as a reified projection, consciousness accumulates spurious properties based on our epistemic drives; properties that distract us from focusing on basic realty.

- Consciousness is an abstract concept predisposed to *metaphorical pluralism*. Those studying it are far from agreeing on a definition. That the key concept bringing the "science of consciousness" community together is so poorly defined suggests the unlikeliness of deriving valid theories, or even of knowing how to set up or interpret experiments – until that is cleared up. The various *metaphysical* definitions of consciousness that place it in a realm beyond mind and matter are fallacious, for all the reasons explained in this text. More objective definitions can allow real science to progress without concern over what it "really is." However if one tries to limit the definition to one that could be measured and that all would agree upon, its *meaning* might evaporate before one's very eyes.

- "Consciousness" is a *graded* concept, even though it is often treated categorically. The sturdiest meanings of consciousness are: (1) it is simply *experience*, i.e. what it feels like to be alive; and (2) it describes what the mind *does*. The first, an interiorist definition, is described in the next item. The second, an exteriorist definition, allows for scientific explorations of consciousness in animals, plants, and humans. In such explorations one does not have to haggle over the metaphysics or the definition of the term; one can agree to disagree on its definition and stick to the observed phenomena. A plant does this under these conditions; a raven does that under those conditions...consciousness can be seen as graded concept admitting to *degrees*, according to however one chooses to define it.

- From a *phenomenological* perspective, consciousness is what it feels like to be alive or aware (depending on how one wants to define it) (see Metzinger, 2004; Clark, 1996). From an evolutionary and neuroscience perspective, we know that animal intelligence becomes more complex and sophisticated through successive layers of neurons that can sense (i.e. are connected to) "lower" layers. (This accumulative layering of neurons – or hierarchical functional units of the brain – happens over the span of species evolution; and also over the span of individual human cognitive development.) An amoeba moves through a biochemical mechanism connecting the state of its environment *directly* to its tail-like pseudopod. More complex animals with nervous systems *sense* the environment and respond through stimulus-to-response *reflex* pathways. Higher order animals can sense these reflexes through complex sensory-motor structures. Successive layers can sense/monitor and coordinate/regulate lower layers – and it is the sensing/monitoring function that appears as "conscious" "awareness." At some level of complexity an animal can *feel* that it is feeling, i.e. monitor and adapt to the automatic impulses arising in its mind/body. Escalating this capacity, human's can feel that they feel, think about their thinking, and be aware of their awareness.

  This is a simplified model of neural architecture, when in fact the sensing of sensing of sensing of sensing ... may pass through hundreds or even thousands of layers (or neurons) within the hierarchical "stack" of human cognition. Some of these connections are below consciousness and awareness, and some are not. In the section on phenomenology we suggested that the *feeling* of infinity made perfect sense given how many connections were alive to awareness (or sub-awareness) in any moment. The same is true of consciousness. When one senses into being conscious or aware, one usually taps into an experience of vast depth and extensive spaciousness. This is what it *feels like* for the human to sense its consciousness. In fact, in a sense, conscious *is* what it feels like to be aware (even if one is not aware of their awareness). In misplaced concreteness, this feeling is projected out as something that must exist "out there" as a vast and expansive process or entity.

- The force behind *epistemic drives* explains why the topic of Consciousness should be so popular and alluring – it brings together one of the deepest questions of science with one of the deepest mysteries of human existence. It is not difficult to literally *feel* the strong meaning-making pull of

such an idea within the mind. Swimming in theories of consciousness can send chills up the spine and trigger a feeling of luminous import.

- Consciousness is implicated in *mystical* experiences as well as ordinary ones. Mystical experiences and flow-states involve an expansive radiance of awareness. Such experiences are more likely to reify consciousness than the mundane experience of consciousness as just thinking, sensing, or feeling. Also consciousness is at a level of abstraction and indeterminacy comparable to other concepts common to mysticism, and is well linked to "questions of ultimate concern," so it is quite susceptible to the problems discussed in our section on mystical thinking.

All of this does not alter the facts that consciousness is a useful concept for making meaning in spiritual discourse; an important thing to study scientifically; and an empowering capacity to develop personally. It's just that all three of these use different definitions of consciousness. One can still make progress in all of these areas if one takes a humble post-metaphysical attitude toward concept definitions ("interpretive pluralism") and has a meta-cognitive sense of what action logic is being used in any moment. In dialogue, let's say at an academic conference on "Spirituality and the Brain," one can become aware of when a conversation veers off of factual-feeling scientific consideration and is carried along by the rapid current and wonderful feelings of deep meaning that such a topic delivers (perhaps supported by a few beers). One does not need to back off from the conversation, but can continue to let one's imagination run wild with possibilities, now free from having to argue so strongly about who is right. One can loosen the shackles of traditional "rationality" and let the mind work holistically and intuitively, allowing novel metaphors to burst from the unconscious, or noticing fresh patterns and possibilities that might some day be tested. One can keep asking: "in *what sense* might that unbelievable idea be right?" to create a more superfluid context for insight generation. Next morning: its back to the lab.

Deeper Dive: The Unconscious

In contrast to the concept of Consciousness, which, I believe, is hyper-valued, over-used, and extra-muddled, the Unconscious is, though similarly muddled in its uses, *very* important to explore, understand, and clarify. This is because, in many discussions of psychology, philosophy, spirituality, and human potential, there is an insufficient distinction and clarity about when one is referring to conscious (or explicit) vs. unconscious (or tacit) knowledge and thought. This is in part because the territory is complex and casting functional conceptual boundaries around the important phenomena is challenging – but we can explore it briefly here with enough resolution to inform our exploration of post-metaphysical thinking.

In the Interlude chapter we argued that: the key challenge facing humanity today is understanding the human mind; and the progress of human development can be described in terms of "minding the gap" between ideas and reality. Here the unconscious plays a pivotal role. In early stages of development (1stPP, 2ndPP) the unconscious is completely hidden. In middle stages (3rdPP and 4thPP) the conscious mind or self increasingly sees, tries to manage, and attempts to heal or integrate unconscious material. Here, one might intellectually understand that, say, "95% of our thinking is unconscious," but one does not experience *oneself* in that way. (One of Lakoff's "three major findings of cognitive science" was "thought is mostly unconscious.")

At later stages (5thPP and above) a type of figure/ground reversal emerges. One becomes less identified with one's group, "identity," beliefs, and thoughts, and more identified with the experience of presence, awareness, aliveness, peaceful silence, emptiness/fullness, and/or Being that remains when those other things are released. The aspect of "emptiness" here is in the contrast between new and old

modes of awareness – since so much has been dropped. A metaphysical interpretation of these phenomena places consciousness in some spiritually advanced realm. Yet actually, it is an experience of "looking" into the very "full," stark yet vibrant, dark yet blinding, invisible yet immense, realm of the unconscious mind. It is metaphorically like the observer sitting at the event horizon of a black hole, with "black body radiation" streaming away from the impenetrable darkness. In the figure-ground switch, one realizes that the self primarily *is* that unknown realm.

That is to say, my unconscious is fundamentally *who I am* (as an interior – it also involves a deeper sense of embodiment, so interior and exterior are felt to interpenetrate). One observes actions, thoughts and feelings arise and pass; one see that one has beliefs and needs; one even observes oneself "making decisions" but, from this new perspective, "I" am not deciding to do any of those things. If I am honest with myself, I don't really know how I produce the stream of words that come out when I have a dinner conversation. I don't know how I understand things when I read words on a page. I see that I decide to do something, but I can't see how I *decided to decide* that. As was mentioned, cognitive science is showing empirically how the unconscious makes decisions before the conscious mind appears to "decide" (Roskies, 2006). The unconscious holds a literally unimaginable amount of information; and it has a literally unfathomable influence on our thinking, acting, and believing. But, in a sense, *we are that*.

It was very late, i.e. only recently, in the historical development of philosophical thought, that humankind "discovered" that we have an unconscious. Though there were intimations of the notion all along the way, our current understanding began at around the time of (and in large part thanks to) Sigmund Freud. Carl Jung, as most readers will know, added key elements to the understanding of the unconscious that scholars and researchers continue to develop. At face value the concept is simple: there are aspects of how the mind works that one is not aware of. However, as we illustrated in the "historical arcs" titled " A brief history of belief fallibility" and "An evolution in understanding ideas vs. the real," the admission that a significant part of one's human Being (and thinking and knowing) happens beyond one's awareness and control was a disturbing insight that humans tended to resist for generations of thinkers (and knowers).

It seems true that Eastern religions and philosophers tended to explore human interiors more extensively than in the West, but even the most advanced such cultures, including the Indo-Tibetan Vajrayana sects of "the Third Turning of the Wheel of Buddhism," developed a deep understanding of perception, conception, and self-sense, but did not develop a sophisticated understanding of psychological "shadow" or the socially constructed nature of ideas (see Wilber, 2000). (And most Buddhist schools, and other ancient wisdom traditions as well, do not demonstrate what we call a construct-aware treatment of concepts.)

The unconscious has a close relationship with the collective. So much of what we learn and who we are grows directly from interactions with others – through family, social, and work contacts, and through communications media. The beliefs and habit patterns that define the self are as much, or more, the products of others and of cultural norms, as they are of one's own decisions or unique experiences. Some would say that the *conscious* sense of individuality is a veneer over the deeper *unconscious* reality of our collectivity. Thus, in a sense, the unconscious *is* collective. (See below for a Deeper Dive on "Collective consciousness and we-beings.")

We will not try to explain or explore the extensive territory of "the unconscious mind" here, but rather will try to show why it is important to differentiate the conscious/explicit/declarative from unconscious/implicit/tacit strata of mind in discussing spiritual (and psychological) phenomena – a concern closely related to our emphasis on *embodiment*.

So much is at stake at the intersection of mind and matter, subjectivity and objectivity, thinking and acting. As we have argued, these are false dualities that have some meaning-making usefulness, but the symbolic impulse drives one to ignore whatever is in the fuzzy area between, and outside of, these dualities. But in this case it is not that we ignore an indistinct but rarely significant set of phenomena at the borders of a conceptual boundary, but rather that these dualities incline one to ignore a gargantuan phenomenon that sits, often invisibly, right in the center: the unconscious (the elephant in the room, so to speak). The unconscious is sort-of *subject*, because it is about one's interior; but it is sort-of *object* because it is a thing outside of awareness and control that greatly affects one. Likewise it can be described in terms of *thinking*, albeit subterranean thought, yet it is also intimately tied to one's *actions* and impulses, and the embodied self. It is no wonder that, focused on those misleading dualities, it took centuries for humanity (Western culture at least) to notice that the unconscious exists.

Unconscious "material" includes memories, beliefs, sensations, and cognitive processes – that one is unaware of. Contemplative practices increase one's awareness of otherwise unconscious sensations, feelings, and thoughts. All of the sources of fallibility and epistemic drives mentioned in this text are unconscious processes. Post-metaphysical thinking includes becoming aware of these processes at work. Intentional learning is largely a process of filling the unconscious mind with material that the conscious mind deems useful. The usual goal is to practice skills until they become automatic, i.e. "unconscious."

As basic psychoanalytic theory tells us, it is all too easy to project material hidden in the depths of the unconscious onto the external world. In fact the mind is organized to do just this through reification and projection. This is one reason it is so important to be curious about what lay beneath – because what is not seen, especially if it is emotionally potent, is very likely to be projected as demi-reality. In projecting outward one ("magically") transforms what is *I/me/mine* into *you/they/it*. I need not expand on the tragic and ubiquitous consequences of this tendency of mind.

The unconscious holds many treasures to be retrieved (in addition to monstrosities to be dealt with). All of what we have said about opening to the gifts of the magical strata of consciousness is basically about accessing resources in the unconscious. Insight, creativity, intuition, emotional vitality, and sensory clarity spring from the unconscious. The spiritually alive and wise life is in contact with its depths. But also: "beware – there go Dragons."

There are basically two ways to get a sense of what happens in one's unconscious. First, one can bring material that is hidden, repressed, or suppressed into awareness. One can also train oneself to become aware of cognitive processes that are usually ignored, such as subtle body sensations and the machinations of thought. However, not every aspect of the unconscious can be made transparent to awareness. For example, I will probably never see directly into the part of the mind that allows me to read sentences and turn them into meaning. So there is a stratum, a penumbra, of unconscious material that one could, theoretically or potentially, become aware of; and deeper layers that are probably forever beyond awareness.

A second way to become aware of the workings of one's unconscious is through observing the manifest results of unconscious processes. One can notice that every time one walks into a Japanese restaurant one feels anxious – and use that fact to explore the self more deeply. Others can bring clues of unconscious processes to one's attention, such as noting behaviors that seem "unconscious" or speech that seems contradictory. (Note that I am not suggesting that anything that *can* be dredged from the depths of the unconscious onto the shores of consciousness *should* be.) Scientists can run experiments, drawing conclusions based on observing many people, to tell us things about how our unconscious mind works, for example that we tend to remember the first and last things we are told better that the middle things.

Minding the gap between ideas and reality involves learning about the unconscious. It is invisible to us (except for those parts of its penumbra that we come to see), yet we can describe some of its properties. In our differentiation of ideas vs. the real, the unconscious is actually part of the *real*. In our explanation of ideas we characterized them in terms of explicit thoughts and beliefs in the form of (implied or spoken) linguistic concepts and statements – thus ideas are susceptible to the complications (and simplifications) of the symbolic impulse. The unconscious operates largely outside of language (though conceptual boundaries are certainly at play in some unconscious processes). The unconscious, as real, is "replete" with practically infinite detail and complexity. It is impenetrable and "withdraws" from knowing it both in the obvious way that it is the hidden part of the mind, but *also* in the way that it is like any other aspect of "reality."

As mentioned in our reference to Jason Brown's work, thought is understood to emerge through overlapping waves of signals that start at the lowest strata of the unconscious mind and progress through developmental strata – from magical through mythical and finally to rational (or meta-rational) modes of cognition. Pre-formed thoughts, emerging from the unconscious and bursting into consciousness, are carved, crafted, and painted, via the symbolic impulse – to take the shapes dictated by language and concepts. When one struggles to put an idea into words, or closely observes the process of writing a poem, or notices the pre-formation of ideas in the silent mind, one can notice how ideas begin in a place without language and emerge into language. When we say that the *magical* action logic is a relatively *simplistic*, i.e. non-complex, mode of thought, we are referring to the conceptual and language-bound structures it serves to consciousness; but *not* to the unconscious mind that it is intimately connected to, which is replete and complex.

Phenomenology and Infinity

If old-style metaphysics is to be questioned, what then becomes of spirituality and religion? Given what we have said about the indeterminacies of language and the truth-distorting force of epistemic drives, what becomes of the search for answers to questions of ultimate concern? We have suggested some alternatives to common modes of spiritual or metaphysical thinking. One is a developmental approach to metaphysics that understands and allows for the gifts of each level of consciousness (magical, mythical, rational, etc.), and reflectively chooses or *constructs a metaphysics* for human self-understanding and action. Another is the self-reflective approach of building awareness skills for noticing how epistemic drives are at play in belief formation and communication – one can notice the pulls and motivations toward metaphysical thinking.

A third approach, compatible to those two, is to eschew the creation and use of metaphysical objects, place less emphasis on abstractions, and stick more closely to the ground of *experience*. In the search for spiritual truths and "the real," experience is our closest encounter with reality. Exposing the sources of fallibility of reason and belief does not need to leave one dry, empty, isolated, or without meaning. In releasing the grasp of abstract ideas and ideals we still have each other; we still have life, love, creativity, passion... – all the richness of a lived life. Our explorations of how meaning making is fallible and fragile need not make life feel meaningless.

Love remains. For example, consider love. Love can be explained objectively through various 3rdPP lenses. Love is a response that results from certain neurotransmitters and neural pathway activations in the body. Love is a set of behavioral responses that evolution has programmed into human genetics to ensure the survival of the species. Love can be subcategorized based on the

mammalian instincts of parental caretaking, romantic/sexual lust, social bonding, and the infant's merging with the mother. But none of this changes the *experiential facts* of love. A 3rdPP analysis of love can help one understand one's experience, but it need not diminish love's experiential depth, complexity, mystery, or rapture.

Love, in its various guises as care, compassion, devotion, etc. is central to religious and spiritual self-understanding. 2ndPP action logics construct moral and metaphysical narratives about what love is and how one should act. 3rdPP abstractions can super-charge these narratives to project universals such as Eros, Divine Spirit, or Universal Love out into the cosmos. We construct the metaphysical object of Love or Eros as a universal force or attractor, as a property of God, or as the essential ground of Being. These narratives can serve a useful purpose, but in this text we invite a post-metaphysical reflective distance from metaphysical narratives.

Again, we suggest grounding in the *experience* of Love. For first and foremost, I *find myself* as one who loves. If I open to that experience ever more deeply I find ever deeper resources of love. I do not need a 2ndPP story about God or Spirit or Cosmic Essence to know this about myself. I do not need a 3rdPP biological or evolutionary or psychodynamic explanation to know this about myself. Yet, *once one locates* love *within*, and empathetically senses that others share the same deep resource, it might be useful to *intentionally* adopt a metaphysics grounded in love. But only after grounding that metaphysics in an experience (rather than a disembodied abstraction).

From a post-metaphysical perspective, my experience is the ground for such truths. 2ndPP narratives and 3rdP explanations can add essential layers of meaning, but should supplement my experience, rather than constrain it by telling me what or how I should, or can, experience love. With experience as the ground, and collective participation and sharing as the primary method of meaning-generation, one can allow stories and explanations to be chosen wisely and held lightly, which allows for flexibility and change as new perspectives and new individuals enter our awareness. Such a metaphysics nourishes the magical and mythical layers of consciousness with sustainable meaning-making resources. It responds to who we are rather than defines or controls who we are. It can also provide differentiations or highlight questions that spur collective reflection and growth.

High stages of psychological or spiritual maturation (i.e. at a construct aware action logic) may reveal how, in a sense, love is *empty*. But it is only empty of the stories we have projected upon it. The human experience of love, and the human potential to love in ever-deeper ways, are givens – they are part of reality as aspects of our endowed humanity. With deeper engagement love is seen in its *fullness* as well as its emptiness. *In a sense,* "love is all there is," and Love is the universal ground of Being, but these words are best understood to point to an experience or a way of being, rather than a romantic but abstract metaphysical belief.

In general we can say of many of the themes in this text, that "deconstructing" the meaning of, for example, spirit, Eros, Gaia, or collective consciousness, through scientific, psychological, or philosophical analysis, need not leave such things inert within the psyche. As with love, the experiences associated with such ideas remain important and primary to human spirituality. Scientific understanding does not reduce the sense in which birth, death, and love are truly "miracles" to behold.

Phenomenology. Descartes is said to have started Western society down a painful path of dualistic thinking with his "I think therefore I am," which conceptually separates mind from body, subject from object – creating faux-paradoxes and other problems. A more apt and embodied aphorism would be "I *experience*, therefor I am." In philosophy "phenomenology" is the term used for methods that focus on experience as sources of truth. Though the more nuanced forms of this methodology are associated with early 20th century philosophes including Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, it harks back much earlier, for example in our above quote of the 14th Century text on "The Cloud of Unknowing," which said "go after experience rather than knowledge..." Modern phenomenology is an important aspect of post-metaphysical thinking.

We have already touched on aspects of phenomenology above. We have implied that Truth and Certainty are, *in a sense*, merely experiences. If one listens to the variety of perspectives on any given subject, one must conclude that a lot of people are mostly wrong about some things, including some who are absolutely sure of themselves. What "true" statements have in common, is not that they are true, but that they *feel* true to the speaker. Similarly, the certainty or importance with which someone holds a truth seems little related to its correspondence with reality. Certainty and importance are, in a sense, feelings. And as discussed previously, mystical experience is often associated with a *feeling* of boundless clarity, wisdom, confidence, and yes, "truthiness." The demi-real involves not just erroneous ideas, but an erroneous *certainty or importance* of ideas.

Even "reality" can be linked to phenomenology, as science has discovered that there are specific cognitive functions that make things appear and *feel* real, as opposed to dream-like, imaginary, or un-real. Oliver Sachs (1990) describes cognitive pathologies called depersonalization and derealization (disorders of the ontological felt-sense), in which individuals feel as if they are observing themselves from outside of their body, or feel as if the objects perceived around them aren't real. Scholars of contemplative practices know that such experiences need not be considered pathological, and can be experienced by otherwise healthy individuals at various locations along the path to experiencing the self-construct as empty.

The above deconstruction of the experiences of truth, certainty, and realness apply differently to different action logics. At 1stPP feeling certain is inseparable from truth and realness. At 2ndPP certainty implies that a person has a pre-rehearsed justification for their beliefs about reality. At 3rdPP the certainty of an idea is based more on following valid empirical methodology and passing the tests of logical consistency and peer critique. But although truth, certainty, and realness have different sources at each level, in the end believing something is true or real with certainty has a strong phenomenological component, regardless of one's action logic.

Next we will apply a phenomenological approach to the philosophically and spiritually troubled concept of "fee will."

Is free will free? Just as there are people with a scientific bent who *elevate* Consciousness to such an extent that they claim it is the fundamental essence of physical reality, there are also those of a scientific bent who *dismiss* consciousness to such an extent that there is a serious scholarly conversation about whether *free will* exists. Cognitive science research has shown that, at least in certain experiments, the brain decides what action a subject will take before and quite independently of the apparent or conscious "decision" to act (Roskies, 2006). Some claim they are

proving that free will is an illusion, and others are alarmed about what that would mean for human self-understanding, and for practical social structures such as a legal system that considers not only actions, but also intentions (Harris, 2014).

Important questions do come out of such research, but the binary question "*do* humans have free will?" is not one of them. This is because, as explained above "free will" is a metaphorical pluralism with no single meaning. So, we are finding that *in one sense*, people don't have free will in the way one might assume, but that *in another sense* (or senses) they do have free will. Importantly, people do have free will from a *phenomenological* perspective. I find myself as one who experiences free will, regardless of (or in addition to) what the scientists tell me. Just as a deeper scientific understanding of love need not diminish the experience of love, the important personal and social construct of free will need not be obliterated because science shows it to be, *in one sense*, empty.

Actually, for millennia serious practitioners of contemplative practices have already learned that, *in some respects*, the experience of free will is indeed empty. This will not lead the meditator into nihilism *unless* they apply a black-and-white action logic to the experience and see only two possibilities: free will exists or it does not. The combination of black-and-white action logics and higher-level contemplative experiences can lead to a "spiritual bypass" phenomenon. For example, a person can use her experience of "no self," i.e. witnessing thought and action as manifesting automatically without any control from a "self" – as an excuse to unplug from the real practical necessities and moral obligations of life.

It may be the case that the "decisions" behind most or all of human action and thought emanate from the unconscious, but this does not need to refute free will (and see the Deeper Dive on the Unconscious). A common (useful, if overly simplified) model in cognitive science differentiates two modes of thought: fast, automatic, intuitive, and unconscious (sometimes called System 1); vs. slower, reflective, rational, and conscious (System 2). (see Kahneman et al., 1982; Evans & Stanovich, 2013). The reflective system is thought to engage when the automatic system reaches an impasse or challenge. It seems that one of the roles of the reflective system, and perhaps its *major role,* is to set up experiences that, in effect, re-program the automatic system. Put simply, even if most of our thoughts and actions are automatic (lacking free will), we engage in intentional learning (and unlearning) processes to train the unconscious to do better in the future, and thus do have this type of control of and responsibility for our lives.

Let's apply a phenomenological approach to some of the themes from the metaphysical statements in Exhibit A.

Feeling and being infinite and empty. In the first chapter we noted that "along the further reaches of the spiritual or psychological path to radical stages of consciousness one can encounter experiences such as profound states of emptiness, bliss, boundlessness, expansiveness, one-pointedness, oneness, and/or compassion." The Two Truths Doctrine used by many spiritual teachers associates such experiences with the metaphysically Absolute, Ultimate, Primordial, Empty, and/or Infinite. These sublime experiences are thought to reveal and give evidence of another realm or an Ultimate Reality. Such narratives might be useful to allow those who have not had such experiences to be motivated to seek them; or to admire those who have attained them –

arguably dubious purposes. But for those who have *had* such experiences, it would seem that metaphysical narratives diminish one's experience more than helping to deepen, integrate, or understand it.

For example, Wilber's quote includes: "an ultimate unity, oneness, infinite harmony and interconnectedness with the entire universe – the discovery of our real Self, Big Mind, the groundless Ground of all Being, the Supreme Identity, the Great Liberation in infinite Spirit." How does one (Wilber or any of the others quoted) move from an *experience* that can best be described as a *feeling* of infinity, or unity, or oneness, or complete emptiness – to a claim about the nature of reality and the cosmos? Under what authority, or using what action logic, is one authorized to make such totalizing proclamations?

As we have said, eternalist claims are taken as valid because this language game, including metaphysical realms and beliefs taken from spiritual authorities, was the accepted mode in the 2ndPP traditions that many spiritual teachers draw from. The human mind simply cannot experience literal infinity – that would take either an infinitely large brain, or if one finds that too reductive, and infinitely large consciousness. The die-hard mystic might say – "Oh, you see, that proves it! – because when you are in that state you are at one with God, with everything." But that sort of self-justifying circular logic is not invited to the humble party of post-metaphysics.

So let's feel into it instead, phenomenologically. A deep gaze into the ocean's horizon or the night sky evokes a sense of vastness. Pause to breathe in that vision. If one focuses on or practices any experience, it can deepen in a somewhat recursive way. One can feel vastness on top of vastness, or one-pointedness at the center of one-pointedness, etc. At around 3rdPP consciousness, the concrete feeling of vastness is abstracted and infinity becomes a possible object of thought, allowing one to imagine, and talk about, the idea of space or time or number extending out hypothetically indefinitely with no end (to both the infinitely large and the infinitely small). Analogously, there was a time when culture(s) developed an early 3rdPP and discovered the concept of infinity, which was eventually formalized as a mathematical construct. The abstract concept of infinity remains metaphorically associated with the concrete experiences of vastness, awe, and incomprehensibility.

How can it be that something "feels" infinite – if we reject the metaphysical notion that one must then be in touch with actual infinity, or God, etc.? I will offer a plausible explanation.

The sublime mystical states of boundlessness, union, bliss, one-pointedness, etc. are examples of what psychologists call "flow states" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Kotler & Wheal, 2017). Though these words point to different flavors along a continuum of experiences, any one of these states actually feels at least a little bit like *all* of the others, and the concepts are connected in a tangle of Metaphorical Pluralisms. The experiences of being/feeling infinitely large and infinitely small are actually closely related, and often co-occur in contemplative practice.

Flow states can be understood as neural activation with great coherence of free-flowing connection across large swaths of the brain. It *feels like* something when our brains are "lit up" with an unusual degree of synchronous activity (as it feels like something to have a dull mind).

This is because parts of the brain are dedicated to monitoring other parts of the brain allowing one to "sense" aspects of one's thinking and feeling (i.e., what we called proprioception of thought).

There are 1 billion trillion stars in the observable universe – about 10 times the number of grains of sand on the earth; and about half a trillion stars in our galaxy alone. These are incomprehensible quantities. The human mind did not evolve to be able to adequately comprehend the difference between, say a billion, and billion trillion, in a direct experiential way. There are about 100 billion neurons in the brain. Each neuron can have up to 10,000 connections. Scientists estimate that the number of neural connections (synapses) exceeds the number of stars in the galaxy by a factor of 1000.

So, what does it *feel like* when the brain in a flow state experiences that many of its neurons firing in a synchronous pattern? Pretty much exactly like *infinity* – as close as we can have it. One cannot blame mystics and spiritualists of ancient times for equating such experiences with the concepts of infinity and boundlessness. Even today, we have no better concepts for describing such sublime experiences than the highly abstracted concept of infinity (or emptiness, which might correspond to the fact that the brain is in a synchronous superfluid state, seemingly empty of chaotic conflicting signals). But one *can* eschew taking the metaphysical leap of believing what ancient wisdom traditions tell one about the actual cosmos based on such experiences.

Finally, we can link the experiences of vast expansiveness and one-pointed emptiness with two complimentary cognitive processes: *scanning* and *focusing*. These can be understood as the most fundamental functions of animal-body awareness. Animal cognition includes a primordial "seeking" drive that underlies both approach towards desired things and avoidance of undesired things (Panksepp, 2005). This core awareness capacity requires two modes: focusing in to gain more detail, and scoping back to see a bigger picture. Wide-angled open awareness is restful and expansive, yet alert; while focused attention is more energized and piercing, gathering specific information in preparation for potential action or decision. In human experience one can feel the play of these two modes of awareness in sight, sound, touch, and inner thought – as one naturally moves between a peripheral-vision-like expansive mode and a more focused attention, according to the needs of the moment. When these core processes are refined or expanded to a sublime degree, as can happen in flow states, contemplative practices, or illumined moments of insight, the experience is magnified. At the extreme of expansive awareness is the experience of infinity, and at the extreme of focused awareness is the experience of one-pointedness or even emptiness. As we have indicated, there does seem to be a mode of cognition that activates both of these modes simultaneously (or interpenetratively), as in flow states the experiences of the infinitely large and the infinitely small are phenomenologically quite close.

Time, space, light, shadow – and spiritual clarity. In addition to feelings of expansiveness and single-pointedness, mystical experiences and flow states can include the related experiences of "timelessness" and "spacelessness." Within 2ndPP action logics it is easy to project these experiences out into claims about reality. The mystic who experiences something outside of time might conclude that time does not really exist, or that they have accessed a realm of objective reality that is beyond time – and similarly with space and the experiences outside of spaciality. We can suggest an alternative (post-metaphysical) explanation for such experiences.

As expanded upon at length in the Wisdom Skills (draft) book, and also somewhat in the Appendix of this book, human wisdom can be understood in terms of two processes: *complexity capacity* and *spiritual clarity*. "Complexity capacity" is the developmental growth process of that accounts for all forms of skill, knowledge, meaning-making, and belief formation. The life path of accumulating knowledge and skill involves building cognitive associations and feedback connections in successive layers of complexity and depth within the brain/mind. In this text we describe the development of complexity capacity in terms of the 1st through 5th person-perspectives.

Along the life path some of what one learns turns out to be non-useful or harmful, and a type of "unlearning" is necessary to establish a healthier or more mature psyche. Aspects of such unlearning are described at length in schools of psychotherapy and in schools of contemplative practice. "Spiritual clarity" is our term for the incremental results of this unlearning, healing, deconstruction, or "shadow work." Similarly, from the perspective of contemplative practice, Churchill (2017) describes the "post-formal metacognitive skills" needed to deconstruct aspects of the self, leading to psychological liberation.

One can visit earlier states in a controlled fashion without fully "regressing" to them. For example, in psychotherapy one might be flooded with the memories and feelings of a difficult moment in childhood. One can maintain an adult meta-cognition that allows for a re-interpretation of the memory and a re-integration of suppressed feelings, without fully regressing to the earlier age and action logic. Multiple action-logics can be "on line" in consciousness simultaneously, though one's mental focus and performance seem to be oriented to one mode in any given moment.

Importantly, we can tie each element of shadow-work to the developmental level at which the problematic learning (sometimes seen as kinks in the flow of psychic life energy or creative awareness) occurred. For the newborn time, space, and self do not exist. Psychological science has revealed much about how the human perceptions of time, space, and self are constructed incrementally for the infant and toddler (e.g. Baillargeon, 2001). Putting all of this together, we can understand spiritually "advanced" states or realizations of timelessness, spacelessness, and egolessness in terms of one's awareness gaining access to developmentally *primitive* states of being. Such access is possible when the neurological connections that constitute our *constructed* experiences of time, space, or ego, are released, seen through, or bypassed to reveal early states of undifferentiated perception.

Thus, the growth of wisdom includes both movements of increasing complexity (in understanding interiors and exteriors), *and* movements of, as Bonnitta Roy calls it, *releasing* complexity (2018). For example, life's insults combined with the symbolic impulse compel us to form countless categories and meta-categories that may, upon deeper reflection, be found to be empty and/or pernicious.

The process does not stop with releasing or deconstructing, as, once "conditioning," "attachments," or "blocks" are seen through, luminous psychic energy and brave new insights are often released. But even though the insights may *feel* sublime and profound, from a post-metaphysical perspective, one still does not have license to transform the experience of

undifferentiated infant consciousness into a claim about how time and space do not really exist as such in objective reality (we can leave that claim to the scientists).

Likewise, one who experiences the, sometimes ecstatically blissful, infant state of undifferentiated merger, might find insights about the nature of *self* (and about *interpersonal* realities), but such experiences alone to not give license to claim that one has discovered that the *universe* is nothing but love (or pure consciousness, etc.). Mystical experiences can thus be understood differently: not as solely "high" states achieved through access to a metaphysical or spiritual realm, but as access to developmentally *early* states, closer to the animal world than the adult world, which are *then interpreted* by the adult mind to reveal meaningful insights.

For example, to "Be Here Now" is to access an important *primitive* state of mind that has been obscured by the mayhem of fast-paced outward-facing modernity. For most of us to live in the "timeless now" is also a developmentally *advanced* practice because, once an important aspect of the self has been cast into shadow, one requires a higher subject-to-object self-awareness to notice and be motivated to re-access, re-activate, re-interpret, and integrate such occluded capacities.

Spiritual synesthesia. The phenomenological approach also helps explain how Metaphysical Pluralisms have implications for deeply "spiritual" or flow states. Cognitive scientists have explored what is called *synesthesia*, in which different senses can involuntarily influence each other and merge (Sacks, 2010; Hubbard & Ramachandran, 2005). For example, a person may experience a faint sense of the color blue whenever they hear a flute; or a faint smell of perfume when they hear the number 21 spoken. The infant brain is in complete synesthesia since the different senses have not even been tuned or differentiated yet. Their eyes do not see and their ears do not hear "things" in the in "booming buzzing confusion" of primordial consciousness – stimulus from the senses inundates the brain with meaningless and indistinguishable noise until, bit by bit, the brain organizes itself to perceive objects. But even in the fully formed adult mind, the brain manifests at least faint traces of synesthesia. And through various practices, or through mind-altering drugs, synesthesia can be experienced more prominently.

The profusion of synesthesia in early states of consciousness helps explain the paradoxical metaphorical and phenomenological pluralisms and co-arising's found in contemplative and mystical experiences. Timelessness and spacelessness are interwoven; infinity and one-pointedness are interwoven; sensations of rapturous bliss can be intermingled with sensations of free-falling disequilibrium; states of transcendent luminosity are intimately close to states of profoundly silent darkness; one-ness with everything is mixed with complete emptiness – Oh ... My ... God! (which itself takes on a kind of literalness).

Gaining temporary or stable access to modes of experience prior to the construction of objects defined by separate sensory channels can explain experiences like auras, light-bodies, channeled messages, and hearing an Om-like cosmic hum of existence. This is not to say that such experiences are unreal, but only to say that an intuition or abstract insight that is not normally connected to a sensory channel, can, through synesthesia, manifest through a sensory channel (or across sensory channels).

For example, a person may, through a means other than visual, be sensitive to faint emotional and "energetic" signals emanating from others' bodies. A synesthesia-involved neural connection could turn this vague feeling into a set of visual colors, providing a clearer signal for the observer to make meaning of. Given what we now know about the brain, which sends anticipatory signals *to* sense organs as well as receiving signals from them, it is entirely possible that, especially with practice, one could see auras around another person's body through such a synesthetic process.

In sum, through a phenomenological approach one can accept and make use of occult-like experiences of timelessness, spacelessness, selflessness, infinity, and emptiness without resorting to problematic metaphysics. The reader can supplement our discussion of phenomenology and metaphysics by looking at the two Deeper Dives below, on "Collective consciousness and we-beings" and "Subtle energies and bodies."

Deeper Dive: **Collective consciousness and we-beings**

Many in progressive cultural movements are experimenting with group practices that include meditation, dialogue, and/or ritual (see overviews in Murray, 2016; Gunnlaugson & Brabant, 2016) I find these projects to be very hopeful and supportive of human evolution overall. Here I wish only to comment on the metaphysical and post-metaphysical trends in this field.

The subject of human collectivity invokes phenomena such as collective intelligence, collective spirit, collective presence, collective will, collective pain, etc. These phenomena are sometimes interpreted metaphysically as pointing to reified objects such as a "Higher We," Spirit, "Circle Being," "Collective Consciousness," or "intersubjective field" that emerges from the group. Below we noted that, "in a sense, the unconscious *is* collective" – but this was not a (classically) metaphysical claim. Emergent objects and properties are real, in the way that a flock of birds is real, and a sports team is real. But, as systems theorists have clarified, collectives and individuals have important differences that should not be confused (Luhmann et al., 2013). At the group level structural and relational properties emerge that are at a different order than the individual. For example, water can be wet but it makes no sense to describe a water molecule as being wet; and an automobile has a "gas millage" property that does not apply to any of its parts.

As we noted with the concepts of Gaia and universal Consciousness (or Mind), when one reifies an experience, idea, or ideal and turns it into an object one tends to project demi-real properties upon that object. A Collective can be characterized by the statistical properties of its parts, and thus a group of individuals can have an average happiness, a most common fear, or an agreed-upon goal, but it can be problematic to posit a collective group *Being* that might have thoughts, intentions, or emotions *of or by itself*. Doing so can make one vulnerable to an over-influence by the magical level of consciousness. At the group level there definitely is a "collective consciousness" in the sense of an aggregate over the group, but that collective is nothing like a flesh-and-blood "being."

As social animals we have instinctive drives to put aside our autonomy and mentally merge with the pack, tribe, or crowd under certain circumstances. In such a state one's awareness is tuned to be able to follow the group or a leader. The human ability to use language to create abstract objects and compelling narratives exacerbates both the positive and negative aspects of orienting to the collective. In "group-mind" state, one becomes more permeable to the outside influences of love, solidarity, fear, panic, rage, humiliation, etc. Thus we can observe both collective intelligence and collective stupidity in groups (Surowiecki, 2004; Masu & Benkler, 2008).

Metaphysical objects, as abstractions, are usually massively simpler than reality, and orienting to such objects can blind one to concrete details and concerns. Though they take on a "reality" of their own, they are initially made up of *our* projections, and thus when we orient to a metaphysical object and "listen" to it we are creating a magnifying feedback loop for our own (individual or collective) unconscious material. This amounts to a falling asleep that is in the opposite direction of "waking up" by making one's unconscious material visible or transparent. Through activation of the magical mind the "larger than life" collective being can assume projected qualities of, for example, the perfectly loving mother or the dominating father to which one regressively relinquishes autonomy.

What about a phenomenological approach to collective consciousness? Under the right circumstances, being in a group can invoke the experience of feeling like an organ within a larger living whole. One can enter into deeper levels of trust, openness, and egolessness to access new truths and healings within the self. Ideas and voices emerge from dialogue that transcend what any individual could have produced. One can enter a flow state in which it seems as though one's speech is one of the many voices within the head of a collective being. These are not metaphysical claims, but attempts to describe experience.

Ideally, members of an intentional group experience will be able to move flexibly through different action logics, putting the rational mind aside to open to the gifts of magical and mythical consciousness, while maintaining the ability to witness, evaluate, and dialogue about what is happening with the wisdom of a 3rd or 4th person perspective. Metaphysical and metaphorical concepts such as "We Being," or "the we without a they," or "the miracle of the we" can be powerful forces of good, if held through a post-metaphysical perspective. Such ideals should be used to supplement, but not replace, the positive *experiences* of collective consciousness.

Deeper Dive: **Subtle energies and subtle bodies**

The topic of subtle energies and the subtle body is complex but worth mentioning. On the one hand, science has not discovered mechanisms or explanations for much of the human experience, including: (1) the aspects of interiorly-oriented contemplative and yogic inquiry that have been understood in terms of the charka or subtle energy theories of ancient traditions; (2) aspects of exteriorly-oriented phenomena such as empathic connections and healing intentions that have been explained through metaphysical frameworks such as prana, shaktipat, élan vital, Qi, kundalini, etc.

We have noted that the 2ndPP meaning-making drive, sometimes infused with early 3rdPP abstraction power, is naturally compelled to construct non-scientific, i.e. metaphysical, narratives that explain significant phenomena that are unexplainable by scientific means. But, as noted, the meaning-making satisfaction of these stories comes at a price, as demi-real layers of additional properties and ideological certainties tend to accumulate upon reified metaphysical objects. As one example, many use the term "energy" to describe flows of sensation through the body (or flows of sensation that seem to extend beyond the body). Baring scientific measurements, the use of the term "energy" in such situations usually turns a metaphor into a reified though demi-real phenomena. This is an example of the "magical" confounding of interior experience with "real" exterior phenomena.

All of this is not to suggest throwing out ancient maps of subtle energies, chakras, etc., but to hold them lightly and not assume that they represent a final explanation of cosmic essences and invisible forces. An alternative to creating ideological metaphysical "explanations" is to engage negative capability and remain open to and comfortable with the unknown, and allow 3rdPP science (and higher order action logics) to replace ancient beliefs with durable explanations at whatever pace those "truths" come.

And they do come. Research at the Heart Math Institute (see McCraty, 2003) has discovered that the heart produces a significant amount of electromagnetic energy – its subtle signals might be able to be felt by other animals many feet away. The maps of subtle energies that yogis feel flowing within the "subtle body" do not seem to correspond to structures in the nervous system or circulatory system, but new research is suggesting that they may correspond well with structures within the lymphatic or fascia systems, and that 'energetic' healing can be understood through known science (Oschman, 2015; Winstead-Fry & Kijek, 1999; Reite & Zimmerman, 1978). Though it sometimes has an uncomfortable overlap with pseudo-science culture, valid scientific methods are exploring how the sciences of liquid crystals, non-linear fluid dynamics, laser-like light pulses, and quantum entanglement may explain aspects of human biology.

We can envision a post-metaphysical understanding of subtle energies and related phenomena that is grounded in science and phenomenology, that respects the useful knowledge passed on from ancient traditions, but without adopting the old metaphysics of imagining a subtle realm beyond time, space, mass, and energy. Our understanding of time, space, mass, and energy will surely evolve, probably in surprising ways, but it is better to allow such knowledge to evolve through 3rdP (or beyond) methods than through 2ndPP reification that projects imagined underlying explanations onto a metaphysical substrate of the cosmos.

In addition, the science and spirituality of the next generation should be linked through post-metaphysical thinking, including phenomenology. The *experiences* that we attribute to a subtle body or Qi energy are profound resources for self-understanding. Yogic and contemplative practices that refine such experiences should be considered essential sources of information in a 4thPP science of the body (for example, see the "experiential anatomy" approach of BBC (Olsen & McHose, 2004)).

Conclusions and Summary

(1) Humanity has reached a crossroads in its cultural (or consciousness) evolution. Since the dawn of the modern age we have relied upon our powers of intellect, looking *outward* to craft a world bursting with technological miracles built upon accumulating scientific knowledge. But we are waking up to "externalities" that, alongside the undeniable benefits of our powerful intellect, are creating world-shattering phenomena such as species extinction, environmental degradation, and unprecedented rates of depression, obesity, suicide, terrorism...the long list of global "crises" is familiar to all. It may be that humanity's list of major troubles has always been long, but only recently, anthropologically speaking, is it true that our biggest threats are products of the human mind and of *human* nature, as opposed to being about the human relationship with Nature.

Religion and spirituality have traditionally provided the meaning-making resources to protect us from despair and confusion in the face of life's "questions of ultimate concern." But, tethered to metaphysical modes of meaning-making, traditional spiritual narratives are ill-equipped for the current era. Any spirituality, or any world-view, that offers a bridge to a sustainable future must look further *inward* – into the interior landscape. It must offer sufficient wisdom about the human condition, including the limitations of human reason, to evolve human culture beyond the so-called "deficient mental" cul-de-sac of modernity.

Any such spirituality must put the modern intellect in perspective by supporting an enlightened *re-integration of the magical and mythical* layers of the human being, while developing a keen awareness of the dynamic unconscious drives emanating from those levels. It must re-enchant,

illuminate, and oversee, not suppress or deny, the layers of consciousness that confer emotional vitality and meaning to the objects we perceive (and conceive). Modern manifestations of secular humanism and interfaith religiosity, by themselves, are too subdued to spark the radical experiences of connection, insight, majesty, luminosity, boundlessness, oneness, wholeness, and emptiness that spring from the archetypal strata of the mind (or "soul"). On the other hand, wide-eyed idealistic "spiritual" frameworks for life often ignore both concrete realities and the darker threats of magical/mythical thinking.

The mystical sages and shamanistic healers of the future only need to understand and skillfully activate the magical (including "archetypal" and some of the "mythical") strata of consciousness, as they always have – ideally from a place of great care and skillful means. They do not need to "believe in" literal or metaphysical manifestations of magical beings and phenomena to do their important work. Concepts such as Spirit and Soul continue to be rich ideas for the metaphorical and metaphysical (and post-metaphysical) dimensions of human Being. We do not want to reject them, but rather find modes of belief-holding and dialogue that move flexibly between levels of interpretation, knowing the ideas are tools for mutual understanding and liberation, rather than realities we are subject to.

(2) Our treatment of the landscape of the contemporary "spiritual but not religious" has been, I think appropriately, slanted towards concepts borrowed from Eastern religions. Starting with the quotes in Exhibit A, and throughout, we have highlighted the related concepts of Absolute (or Ultimate) Reality (or Truth), Ground of Being, and Emptiness. This territory that mystics experience and point us toward, is, I would agree, an essential, perhaps *the* essential, focus of the spiritual journey. The knowing of this territory (which is also, paradoxically, an unknowing) is accompanied by profound compassion, selflessness, bliss, expansiveness, one-pointedness, lucidity, peace, freedom, and/or sacredness. Not as ends in themselves, but as resources of human potential that can make a difference to others and for our world.

Mystics, and the codified mysticism found in esoteric religious texts, has always known that this territory is ineffable, easily misunderstood, and easily taken as an object of egotistic fixation; and have tried in various ways to describe the wrong turns and dead-ends along "the path." These provisos, plus trying to limit certain teachings to those with specific attainments, were the best they could do to negotiate the dance between making knowledge available and avoiding its misuse in their era.

What we are suggesting in this text is that, in the modern and post-modern context, the quasi-literal language of absolutes and ultimates is no longer an appropriate metaphysics. First, this is because, at least as they are often framed, they grate against the expected norms of rational discourse. Second, it is because the emerging capacities of 4thPP (and 5thPP) action logics allow for a post-metaphysical languaging and comprehension that better meets the underlying goals of the spiritual (and esoteric religious) teachings.

(3) In this text I have offered a post-metaphysical perspective on ideas and ideals woven into contemporary "spiritual but not religious" discourse. The topics covered, sometimes briefly and sometimes in depth, include (in brackets is the section containing that theme):

- Quotes from contemporary teachers/mystics making claims about Soul, Spirit, Godhead, Consciousness, Reality, Source, Non-duality, etc. – that include metaphysical descriptors such as absolute, ultimate, infinite, supreme, essential, primordial, eternal, formless, perfect, and universal. [*The metaphysics to Come*]
- An analysis of the "Two Truths Doctrine" that posits Absolute Reality (or Truth) in contrast to Relative Reality (or Truth); including a discussion of emptiness and dependent origination. [*Two truths: One Problem*]
- Gaia – the Earth as a being. [*Constructing the Real*]
- Recursively structured classification frameworks such as Yin/Yang, Masculine/Feminine, astrology, and personality typing systems. [*Constructing the Real*]
- Soul, Spirit, Higher Self, Unique Self, True Self, Absolute Self. [*Reification and Misplaced Concreteness*]
- Eros and Archetypes (Lover, King, Trickster, etc.) (with a short treatment of absolute reality and emptiness) [*Reification and Misplaced Concreteness*]
- Spiritually potent dualisms including: good/evil, saint/sinner, dark/light, spirit/matter, mind/body, interior/exterior, individual/collective, state/stage, empty/full, absolute/relative, self/selfless, and being/non-being. [*Embodied Realism and Metaphorical Pluralism*]
- Emptiness and Dependent Origination (co-dependent arising), revisited. [*Embodied Realism and Metaphorical Pluralism*]
- Time and Causality; plus a brief tap at the questions: Do slugs have emotions? Are dolphins intelligent? Are computers intelligent? Do apes use language? Are rocks or trees or atoms conscious? Do we have a soul? [*Embodied Realism and Metaphorical Pluralism*]
- Metaphysical descriptors such as absolute, ultimate, infinite, supreme, essential, primordial, eternal, formless, perfect, and universal--revisited on phenomenological grounds [*Epistemic Drives*]
- Consciousness and the Unconscious. [*Epistemic Drives*]
- Love and free will [*Phenomenology and Infinity*]
- Infinity, emptiness, one-pointedness [*Phenomenology and Infinity*]
- Timelessness, spacelessness, unity, and selflessness. [*Phenomenology and INFINITY*]
- Auras, light-bodies, channeled messages, and the cosmic hum of existence. [*Phenomenology and Infinity*]
- Collective consciousness and We-beings. [*Phenomenology and Infinity*]
- Subtle energies and subtle bodies (distance healing, chakras, prana, Élan Vital, Qi; synchronicities, affirmations). [*Phenomenology and Infinity*]

As the reader knows, these topics were not explored in terms the specific beliefs surrounding their use, but in general terms of how they relate to metaphysical and post-metaphysical thinking.

Throughout the text I tried to "practice what I was preaching" by laying bare the indeterminacies, fallibilities, and metaphorical pluralisms of the central concepts of my framework. Models such as the five person-perspectives; concepts such as truth, reality, reason, consciousness, and reification; and dualities such as ontology/epistemology, reality/ideas, interiors/exteriors, metaphysics/post-metaphysics, reason/emotion, and concrete/abstract – were all revealed to have fuzzy boundaries and inconvenient interdependencies.

(4) Questions of ultimate concern tap into our deepest needs, fears, and dreams. They are "ultimate" in at least two senses. First, they seem larger than we are – like obscure metaphysical mysteries or un-graspable "hyper-objects." But they are also ultimate because they are omnipresently *immanent*, touching the most minute, mundane, and intimate aspects of life. Renouncing the "ultimates" of eternalist truths, primordial foundations, and grand narratives does not mean we have to turn our backs to these questions.

Is there a God? – A Soul or Spirit? – A Purpose to life? – A life after death? – An Ultimate Reality? What is Consciousness? Is there a cosmic force of Eros? Do we have free will? What is the Good? ...

Viable answers will not be found in this text, nor within the frozen commandments of any future religion or spiritual framework. We can no longer look to eternally-true authorities for answers to these questions – we must develop ways of thinking that allow the answers to evolve with us and through us. Similarly, we can no longer afford to project the causes and sources of human love and resilience onto an imaginary metaphysical realm (God, Spirit, Cosmos, Eros, etc.) that then turns back to capture us with the force of its demi-real narrative. To be truly resilient we must ground our metaphysics and ethics in an ontology that embodies the realities of the human condition. Post-metaphysical thinking is not non-metaphysical thinking, but rather a stage of wisdom that supports us in collectively and reflectively *constructing* the metaphysical foundations of a thriving society.

The post-metaphysical injunction to reflect upon our metaphysics and metaphysical thinking, rejecting some of it but not all of it, is a nuanced affair. One needs to develop the skills of giving oneself fully (or almost fully) to the unknown territory of the unconscious, as it bubbles up through the magical strata of mind, at just the right times, yet while keeping lit the pilot light of rational (and post-rational) thought. Culturally, we must perform the developmentally sophisticated operations of de-reifying our Gods, i.e. bringing them down from the heavens and back into the workshop, where we can make adjustments, refinements, and do complete re-designs; to then be able to launch them back into the heavens, believing in them with all of our souls, but only while that serves our deepest needs.

Within this delicate dance I have tried to strike the right note between critique and appreciative inquiry. While exposing the many sources of indeterminacy in the contemporary spiritual meme-scape, I want to emphasize the importance of skillfully "suspending disbelief" (or play "the believing game") to access the magical, mystical, and metaphysical gifts of life, for example:

− To sense the large oak in the forest as a Being that I am intimately connected with – that whispers forgotten truths into my inner ear;
− To imagine that that a Universal Love or Eros saturates the cosmos, animates life forms, breaths consciousness into my own being, and motivates cosmic evolution; and
− To experience the co-presence within a group as connected through a meta-being that contains us all in a higher wisdom, and into which I can release myself.

Such things are critical, not as literal indicators of metaphysical truths, but as *experiences* that can be penetrated for deeper, if fallible, truths. Importantly, post-metaphysical thinking must include a *phenomenological* inquiry into the truths found in raw experience – it cannot be limited

to abstract reasoning about "things" and "the other," or narratives comforting to Reason. In arriving at any shared world-view, i.e. in proclaiming what is "real" and how it is real, the metaphysics of the future must be influenced by both scientific methods and the deepest of human intuitions, metabolized through generative participation and caring dialogue.

(5) If, when looking within we see that the basis of our being shines with Love, we can then choose to adopt a metaphysics that activates the magical and mythical levels of being by feeling into the divinity and omnipresence of that Love. We can claim it as real. Similarly, we can plumb the depths of our experience to mine the resources of compassion, curiosity, forgiveness, gratitude, creativity, endurance, and integrity that can produce inspirited actions and uplifting artifacts. For such a "deliberate metaphysics" we can craft a science-compatible Universe Story that includes metaphysical assumptions about the miraculous divinity of nature and the essential goodness of human nature (e.g., see Swimme & Berry; 1992; Dowd, 2008). We can allow for flexible, participatory, generative, local, and humble "grand narratives" addressing questions of ultimate concern.

If, on the other hand, an individual or group looks deeply within itself and, in that moment or continuously, does not find that the foundation is built from components such as love, curiosity, forgiveness, respect, and integrity, but rather finds pain, hatred, or fear at what seems to be the foundational layer, then this is a signal to call in resources for healing to mend the broken heart or traumatized mind; to transform the disfigured pathways of life-energy in the body/mind. It is *not* the time to re-imagine a new metaphysics, nor to reproduce a given one.

For those ensconced in "status quo" reality in between these two extremes, escaping from the metaphysical assumptions of the "consensus trap" will no doubt involve initial phases of dissonance and discomfort. I hope that the arguments made in this text will motivate such an inquiry and help one negotiate the transitions. And for anyone on such a journey – one that allows for hope while facing "reality" – *grief and longing* are bound to be constant companions that should be welcomed and listened to. Any future spirituality must include resources up to the task of navigating significant and unpredictable change. The metaphysics to come must account for the *losses* and emptiness(es) that come with healing and change.

(6) We have emphasized an *embodied* orientation to reason and belief-formation. Embodiment has many implications. Human reason is a wet-ware product of evolutionary caprice; and reason is influenced by unconscious drives and distortions born in the ancestral past and from the misfortunes of a lived life. Reason is intimately imbedded in the concrete processes of action and dialogue. Abstract concepts are grounded in sensory-motor primitives; and are "enacted" as much as conceived. Ideas are "tools" more than "truths," and lose relevance if they don't attend to the "seriousness" of pragmatic life. They also lose validity in the face of "performative contradictions." All of this speaks to the embodiment of Reason.

We have made heavy use of a *developmental* model describing 1stPP through 5thPP action logics. This framework is an orienting generalization and categorical simplification of the complexity of the human condition; however its contours are backed up by dozens of psychological theories and thousands of scientific studies. With each succeeding action logic consciousness builds capacities to see increasingly complex patterns in the world; and builds the

skills of ever-deeper self-understanding. The meaning-making drive operates at every developmental level of consciousness, answering life's ultimate questions by producing emotionally charged objects (1stPP), compelling narratives (2ndPP), reasonable truths (3rdPP), multi-perspectival wisdoms (4thPP), and empty-while-full pearls of holistic/cosmic insight (5thPP and above). Rather than fully characterize each action logic in one central place, I have chosen to spread an accumulation of descriptors of these levels throughout the text.

We have used the term "4th person perspective" (4thPP) to indicate the embodied "wisdom skills" that meet the requirements of a *future*-ready and *present*-grounded spirituality that can sense into how personal, cultural, and anthropological *pasts* live within the subterranean strata of the mind/body. At 4thPP many of the *sources of fallibility* within human ideas and ideals become known, and a deeper humility and self-understanding is possible. There are sources of fallibility at many cognitive levels including: perceptions, conceptions, beliefs, models/theories, and entire world-views. In this text we have focused on the level of *conception*, that is, at the level of concepts and objects, which touch the *ontological* and *metaphysical* questions about "What is real?" that underpin the "What is true/good?" questions behind beliefs, models, theories, and worldviews. We have also hinted at the wisdom skills associated with 5thPP that begin to emerge at 4thPP, including construct aware consciousness.

(5) A key aspect of 4thPP consciousness is a "*post-metaphysical* thinking" that, among other things, illuminates the nature of ideas and objects derived from *metaphysical* thinking. Along our journey we have illustrated the fallibilities and dangers that accompany the benefits of unreflective magical, mystical, and metaphysical thinking. To summarize, the sources of these fallibilities and dangers include:

- *Magical* modes of thought that confuse interior and exterior phenomena, and imbue non-living objects and abstractions with human properties such as intention and feeling.
- *Mythical* modes of thought that project story lines, including totalizing narratives, upon reality to satisfy the epistemic drive for the world to makes sense.
- *Hyper-rational* modes of thought that disenfranchise emotions and intuitions, and ignore that which can't be measured and that which can't be neatly categorized.
- *Metaphysical* modes of thought that invent realities beyond time, space, and matter as convenient "locations" to uncritically store beliefs and simplistic answers to complex life questions.
- *Epistemic drives* that compel us toward abstractions, ideals, universals, essentials, totalities, eternals, and infinities;
- The *symbolic drive* that cleaves reality into neat categories and dualities, producing demi-real byproducts such as faux-paradoxes.
- *Misplaced concreteness* (reification) that paints abstract ideas and ideals with demi-real properties of concrete objects.
- The impossibly objective "*view from nowhere*" that supports the individual analytical mind in drawing universal conclusions without reference to multiple perspectives and actual conversations.
- The *disembodied* character of modern and Western thought, which disjoins mind and matter, spirit and body, reason and intuition, thinking and acting/being – reductively favoring the

first and marginalizing the second of each of these; distancing us from the blood, sweat, tears, and sod of life.

This list is long but its items are so deeply related that the basic shifts in attitude and complexity found at 4thPP can work holistically towards reconciling all of them. This shift is neither easy nor guaranteed, but it is possible. Development happens when sufficient challenge meets sufficient support, and when the psyche is clear of shadow elements that are attached to the known. Perhaps paradoxically, because our world is rife with challenges adequate to this task, the best strategy for building 4thPP thinking is to release or deconstruct unnecessary complexity built up within lower strata, rather than effort to achieve a new level of complexity.

(7) As we come to see that many of the answers culturally handed down to us – wrapped in universal truths, fundamental essences, and grand narratives – are, in some sense, metaphysical counterfeits, post-metaphysical thinking allows us to pan the gold hidden within the sludge. It allows us to pierce the veil of certainty surrounding knowledge bequeathed by the crowd, admired teachers, or "pure" rationality. Post-metaphysical thinking can acknowledge and begin to adapt to the above sources of belief fallibility through tools, skills, and attitudes that we have mentioned, and summarize below:

- The *negative capability* of tolerance of, and playfulness with, uncertainty, ambiguity, and unknowing.
- Having an *embodied* philosophical orientation to reality (summarized just above) that views cognition as constrained by the contingencies of evolution, the physicality of the brain, and the drives of the socially-embedded being.
- *Minding the gap of demi-reality*, i.e. refining the skill of sensing the differential qualities of ideas/ideals vs. concrete reality.
- Developing a *construct aware* appreciation for the cognitive nature of concepts in language including: misplaced concreteness (reification), metaphorical pluralism, the symbolic impulse (categorical splitting that creates dualisms, faux-paradoxes, faux-fractals, and other demi-real illusions); and the graded, exemplar-based, and metaphorical nature of abstract concepts.
- The *interpretive pluralism* of assuming that claims are binary and questions have single answers; asking "in what sense" something is true or real (or not); and "under what definitions, and assuming what exemplars, can one acknowledge another's claim.
- The delicate developmental psychic choreography of balancing the (1stPP) "pleasure principle", (2ndPP) meaning-making drive, (3rdPP) "reality principle," and (4thPP) holistic drive; i.e. suspending rational judgment and *opening to magical and mythical thinking*, while maintaining enough post-rational wisdom-skill to avoid being swindled by the simplicity, naïveté, and narcissism of the primitive mind.
- Engage in the therapeutic or contemplative *shadow work* of reducing reality-distorting complexities, lacunas, and blockages to uncover, recover, or reconstruct the lower strata of the psyche.
- The *phenomenological approach* of: grounding spiritual truths in experiences – as opposed to allowing ideals or theories to limit experiences and dictate interpretations; developing a proprioceptive felt-sense for when the magical mind is keenly engaged; and feeling into the bundle of epistemic drives as they pull at one's attempts at meaning-making.

- Nurture a *procedural rationality* that emphasizes how people think over what people think – replacing foundationalism with "fallibilism."
- Taking a *participatory and dialogical* approach to building and applying knowledge about world, self, and society; seeking diverse perspectives and applying humility, openness, vulnerability, and curiosity to collective truth-seeing activities.
- Holding searches for the "truth" and "reality" as fundamentally *ethical, emancipatory*, and self-emancipatory – as grounded in sincerity, authenticity, respect, gratitude, forgiveness, and care.
- Using the *idea portability principle* while communicating one's beliefs – i.e., that the greater the distance between the worldviews or beliefs of interlocutors the more important it is to understand and compensate for indeterminacy.

Any sustainable spirituality (or world-view) of the future must have elements of the 4thPP post-metaphysical skills listed above, to allow humanity to address perennial "questions of ultimate concern" in ways that holistically meet the needs posed by multiple layers of the psyche. Obviously, this is not a how-to book containing practices and success stories related to these skills and attitudes. The focus has been on generative and clarifying ideas rather than practices, and I hope that the many invitations to connect the rather philosophical ideas to life experience have compensated for the degree of abstraction. The motivated reader can find many sources of practical advice on contemplative practice, psychotherapy, deep dialogue, and critical self-reflection elsewhere. And again, though this list may seem daunting, the elements are massively interconnected and co-creational, with each supporting the others in the developmental move into a 4thPP action logic.

Epilogue. This text is intentionally hopeful. The author realizes that humanity's myriad problems and "crises" look quite dire, and understands that a nearly miraculous degree of cultural consciousness transformation toward something like 4thPP, *and/or* an impractical proliferation of psychic healing, would be needed to reach a species-wide "tipping point" that would usher in a sustainable global human system. Perhaps I am pointing a flashlight down one of the more hopeful-looking roads leading out of a dimly lit crossroad along the Anthropocene; but I have little comprehension of who may go there, how long the road is, or what other resources are required for the journey. Actually, that metaphor is not very apt – I am offering a few conceptual tools for the suitcase and some compass points for the map for such a journey, rather than lighting up an entire road. But I am confident that the basic tools are necessary, sturdy in the right hands, and generally wieldable for those willing to practice.

I have suggested a clearing and cleaning out of unnecessary (classical) metaphysics and a collective re-building of a more nourishing and radiant *deliberative and embodied metaphysics*. The many perspectives I have given on this post-metaphysical approach may make this seem complicated and daunting. But, in a sense, it is as simple as looking into the eyes of others with openness and care, responding to the vulnerable human needs arising in that context, and translating one's response into a deliberate metaphysics by articulating the core values and beliefs that arise there. It *is* complex and daunting because the layers of demi-reality and egoic attachments that accumulate in the psyche in modern culture are indeed complex and daunting. Social structures reify and reinforce these patterns. Releasing this "baggage" can be disorienting and painful; and seem completely impractical in those back-alleys of culture that are maliciously committed to

perpetuating the demi-real. But, I submit, all of this reality may be more malleable than we imagine. The science of chaotic systems allows for miracles in concrete reality.

Your author has ample direct (often humbling) experience in his own life that, in a sense, reality is constructed by one's projections onto it. At least at the local level of human interaction, a shift in attitude, a released fear or craving, a pause to wonder – can create a recognizable "ontological" change in others, as well as oneself. If the global indeed emerges from the local, these are powerful spiritual acts. I may not be able to bend a spoon with my mind, magically manifest the new car of my dreams, or heal a distant stranger with my prayers, but with every small step of taking responsibility for my actions, thoughts, beliefs, energetic presence, and even my emotions and the contents of my unconscious, I learn that the metaphysics that I embody co-creates a reality. If a sufficient number of people seemed to agree, not with my ideas but with a similar metaphysics, then maybe a new sun would peek through the clouds of our species-wide predicament. Perhaps it already has. Perhaps you are among those responsible for it.

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Appendix – Developmental Basics

This appendix supplements the subsection "A developmental perspective" with details about cognitive or meaning-making development. In that section we briefly described the developmental stage model used in this paper as using these "action logic" levels:

- 1stPP: magical/impulsive,
- 2ndPP: mythical/conventional,
- 3rdPP: rational/autonomous, and
- 4thPP: meta-rational/pluralistic.

Additional details on each level are found in the side-bar Deeper Dive at the end of this Appendix.

The first term refers to the level of cognitive complexity that can be brought to bear in making meaning of the world. The second term refers to how that cognitive capacity manifests when it is applied to the subjective and intersubjective domains of I, me, you, us, and them in the psycho-social world.

Developmental theories have a variety of schemes for naming and describing such levels (e.g. see Fischer, 1980; Commons & Pekker, 2008; Wilber, 2000), but these will do for our purposes. The "1stPP, 2ndPP..." terminology refers to first, second...etc. *person-perspectives* or action logics, the naming convention used by O'Fallon's STAGES model (O'Fallon, 2011, 2013; Murray, 2017), and suggested in Cook-Greuter's Ego Development Model (Cook-Greuter, 1999, 2011; Torbert & Livne-Tarandach, 2009), and which is compatible with Kegan's "construct developmental" model (Kegan, 1994).

The developmental perspective is an extremely useful one that is applicable to almost every domain of human inquiry, yet is surprisingly absent from most disciplines. One of its main gifts is the following. In many areas questions of practical application return a plethora of answers, for example: What is the best type of government for a country? What psychotherapy method should my friend seek? How can educators support self-directed learning? What are good tips for a supervisor giving feedback to a supervisee? Should children be told partial truths or whole truths?

Such questions return such a wide variety of answers from different theories and experts that seeking expertise may only result in more confusion. Yet when one applies a developmental lens to the heap of answers for any of these questions, one often finds that the answers spread out prismatically into usable sub-sets. The answers to the questions depend on the developmental level of the target (or social context). So a developmental theory with six levels can organize the answers into six groups, providing some essential structure to the complex inquiry.

The categorical lines drawn are of course very approximate, and developmental theories vary on how they segment human development. So, for example, one theory might organize the answers into five sets and another seven. But the nature of the entire spectrum is substantially similar among these theories. The fundamental developmental process is that each level or stage builds upon, "sees," or "operates upon" the prior levels.

Psychological scholarship contains many developmental theories, dating famously back to Jean Piaget (1896 -1980) and even earlier (E.g. James Baldwin 1861 - 1934). These theories followed Darwin's (1809–1882) theory of evolution to deepen our understanding of how we became, and become, human. In a general sense, each human skill or capacity grows separately through developmental dynamics (e.g., music, athletic skill, logical skills, etc. – see Gardener's theory of multiple intelligences" 1983). But in this text we use the term "development" to refer specifically to the development or maturity of human meaning-making, as it is framed in Kegan's theory, or the ego, as it is framed Loevinger's theory, later updated by Cook-Greuter and O'Fallon. It can also be framed in terms of the development of "perspective taking" – but that term has other meanings that might confuse the subject so we use it less.

In Murray (2017) I give a summary of the ego development models of Loevinger, Cook-Greuter, Torbert, and O'Fallon, including references to scientific validity studies. Kegan's construct developmental model, which is very compatible with ego development, is explained in Kegan (1984). The primary theorists in the neo-Piagetian tradition are Fischer, Commons, and Dawson (see Fisher, 1908; Commons et al., 2008; Dawson, 2004). Wilber (2006) offers a model as an "orienting generalization" that synthesizes elements of all of these models, but does not contain the level of detail or rigor achieved by each of them.

Developmental stages (or levels or "action logics") are defined in terms of the *structures* of thinking, not its content. Development proceeds from more black-and-white, all-or-nothing, either-or, us-vs-them modes into thinking that takes multiple perspectives into account, reflects upon the context and limits of thinking, and tolerates uncertainty and paradox.

So called "neo-Piagetian" developmental theories suggests striking parallels in the development of meaning-making complexity in *individuals* over the life span vs. in *cultures* over historical or anthropological time spans. These theories use the idea of complexity (actually "hierarchical complexity") to track development in individuals from the simplicity of childhood into advanced stages of wisdom in adulthood. Though one should not make the mistake of assuming that the developmental complexity of *cultures or groups* evolves over time following the same mechanisms that drive an individual's development, the same complexity levels are still quite useful in describing the complexity of cultural and group dynamics. For example, the broad distinctions between magical/pre-operational, mythic/concrete-operational, and rational/formal-operational action logics, as they were defined for child-to-adult development, are useful in describing historical trends in philosophical and cultural thought.

Caveats. Though we consistently refer to developmental progressions in this text, several caveats warrant pre-stating. First, though the sequence of levels is fixed by definition because each builds upon the prior, developmental progress is *not guaranteed* for any individual or group, and development can stagnate or even regress. Second, meaning-making complexity is only one of many ways to characterize human differences and trends, and it must be emphasized that more complex is *not necessarily "better."* This is because the action logic used can be unnecessarily and problematically complex for a given context; and because complex thought can be used for narcissistic and nefarious reasons as well as for "good" reasons (as some frame it, some highly developed individuals harbor significant "shadow" material). Also, earlier or more "primitive" levels of cognition are actually more fundamental and important to the health of the whole person.

Third, it is an oversimplification to use developmental levels to form *caricatures of people or groups*. It is better to assume that the action logic that a person operates from varies according to context, though it may be useful to consider average modes (e.g. a "center of gravity") or general trends. Finally, like many constructs used in psychology and sociology, for example "extroversion," the developmental categories that we will use are composite *simplifications* from a large body of empirical research that contains nuances and differences of definition beyond our scope here.

Despite these caveats, developmental theory provides a very useful metric for some purposes, including ours here, since it parsimoniously charts the progression from pre-scientific thinking, to scientific rationalist thinking, to the post-modern critique of reason, to the post-metaphysical (or post-post-modern) integration of all those prior modalities. Throughout this text we make the case that post-metaphysical thinking, as defined by Habermas but also as an emerging contemporary wisdom in how knowledge is held in culture, maps roughly onto what developmentalists call "4th Person Perspective" (4thPP). Roughly speaking, 1stPP and 2ndPP map to pre-scientific thinking; 3rdPP maps to rational and scientific thinking; early 4thPP maps to the post-modern critique, and late or full 4thPP maps to post-metaphysical thinking. (

Our purpose here is not to make a scientific or factual claim that 4thPP, as measured by developmental scientists, correlates with observed cultural trends. Rather, we are simply *using* an existing description of developmental action logics as an expedient and powerful framework that unites the diverse routes through which we will approach the topic of post-metaphysical thinking.

Readers of this journal are likely to be familiar with various theories of adult development, and how they, though diverse in content and origin, show a remarkable overlap in basic findings and principles. We discuss this territory in depth in the primary text on Wisdom Skills, but below will give a skeletal overview of the basic developmental sequence.

Developmental Dynamics. Each level builds upon the prior – it does not replace it. At best it "includes and transcends" the prior level(s), though aspects of each level can also become hidden, repressed, or distorted in the turbulent journey of growth to the next level. The earliest or deepest layers of our cognitive apparatus were "designed" through an evolutionary process that layers each capacity upon earlier ones. Cognitive and brain sciences confirm how the most primitive aspects of thought, including emotions, are essential aspects of all advanced rational thought. In fact, brain science maps out a rough progression of layers of neural substrate that support the notion of developmental action logics literally building upon each other.

Rather than pegging an individual or group "at" a developmental level, we assume that each individual has access to a *range* of developmental levels, and, sometimes intentionally, sometimes not, manifests at different levels depending on the context. Under conditions of stress, complexity, or novelty, individuals may "downshift" from their typical action logic to a lower one, for example to a child-like state of unregulated emotions (the "amygdala hijack" famously described Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence*). Individuals can also purposefully choose to suspend higher-level action logics to accentuate lower levels, as when accessing childlike playfulness or magical wonder. So-called peak experiences and flow states can temporarily sweep one into an uncharacteristically high action logic.

Developmental theories describe "phases" of learning within or between levels. Though most skills are learned through a combination of paying attention to specific aspects of the world and engaging in practice and/or repetition, skills eventually become *automated and normalized*, and move into the unconscious. Unless one is teaching others a skill or explicitly reflecting on it for some other reason, the details of how one actually accomplishes that skill can become hidden from consciousness. For example, with the help of others one can learn how to play tennis or be a good parent, but once one becomes skilled one may not be able to describe how one does these things.

The progression to higher (i.e. later) levels is called "vertical" (or hierarchical) growth. Learning involves the "horizontal" growth of a wide array of capacities at a particular level, followed by a vertical transition to the next level. (This is an extreme simplification – elaborated in the primary text on wisdom skills). A sufficient breadth, interconnection, and coherence of knowledge and skills are required for the emergence of a new level.

Healthy development is considered to include a robust (horizontal) range and diversity of skills at each level before the next level develops (vertically). Developmental theories hold that the emergence of a new level is triggered when an existing level of skill is experienced as insufficient to match the complexity of life's demands. For a variety of reasons, individuals may accrue a significant breadth of knowledge and then plateau at a particular developmental level, for example the mythical/conventional (2ndPP) level, without experiencing or adapting to conditions that shape the next level.

Most educated individuals in modern cultures operate at late 2ndPP or 3rdPP, with professionals and the well-educated tending to cluster around 3rdPP, and with decreasing percentages of the population achieving 4thPP and higher. Cultures tend to pull their members up to the average developmental level (i.e., enculturation) and inhibit individuals from developing much further, since doing so can threaten the status quo.

The mind in shadow. In addition to learning horizontally and developing vertically, some mental capacities or structures can become hidden, compromised, or even pathologically distorted, along the way. It is now well recognized that early, or more "primitive," layers of the psyche contain many patterns of thought and emotion that are invisible, repressed, or suppressed through the enculturation process. Sexual desire and rage are the most obvious examples. We are trained, often forced or coerced, into controlling and managing animal instincts and "childish" behaviors, presumably in order to be able to function acceptably in society.

Developmentally earlier modes of thought can be repressed or suppressed for adaptive purposes that serve a need at the time. The child may learn to "stuff" her anger because she learns that pro-social behavior gets more needs met; or she learns that expressing anger does *not* result in her needs being understood or met (and in dysfunctional families expressing one's needs may actually be dangerous to the child). But of course repressing ones' anger can lead to psychological problems as an adult. Thus, along with the original benefits of suppressing or repressing primitive parts of the self, something is always lost as well.

The denied or resisted aspects of the self are never completely eliminated; they are merely removed from conscious thought and intentional action. As a result there are conflicts between

parts of the self – between the conscious and the unconscious (ego and id in Freud's terms), or between parts of the unconscious that manifest competing needs. Psychic energy can be bound up and distorted as a result. Creativity is another common casualty of such suppression and repression. Self-understanding and maturity are also compromised when aspects of the self are denied or invisible. The lowest layers of cognition are the most intimate with the mammalian/reptilian brain, and closest to emotional energy and bodily vitality; thus psychic inhibitions to the magical or mythical layers of the psyche can limit the full expression of one's humanity and potential.

Reflective and healing practices such as meditation or psychotherapy are often aimed at retrieving what was lost – to regain access to perceptual clarity, vitality, creativity, self-understanding, psychic wholeness, and psychological growth. Developmental theorists often contend that "cleaning up" shadow material in lower levels is more important that achieving ever-higher developmental levels. According to most theories, vertical development should not be forced because it happens naturally when an individual encounters new challenges, provided: (1) there is sufficient support; (2) sufficient horizontal knowledge has been learned; and (3) there is not too much shadow material inhibiting the growth process.

In the primary text on wisdom skills, I frame meaning-making maturity in terms of "wisdom skill" – a combination of "complexity capacity" plus "spiritual clarity." *Spiritual clarity* refers to psychological, cognitive, contemplative, or "spiritual" processes of becoming aware of and cleaning up or integrating the accumulation of negative patterns and beliefs. This healing or "ablation" of the hidden inconsistencies and tensions (shadows) within deeper layers of the psyche can be organized using the same levels as are used for developmental complexity. In other words, it is useful to categorize the pathologies or tensions according to the action logic level that they arose within or inhibit.

Deeper Dive: **Person perspective action logics**.

We can use our framework of 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th person perspectives to outline this trajectory. Here are indications (not full definitions) of these levels:

- 1st PP: There is no reflection on truth or validity – one just does what one wants, or what one has been coerced into doing, and has a difficult time understanding why others don't see the world as they do.
- 2nd PP: "I am right [or we are right] and others are wrong." The reasoning is black and white, but there is an understanding that others have beliefs (i.e. interiors) – they are just wrong beliefs and the others need to be coerced or ignored. Beliefs are justified with reference to authorities, norms, or personal experience.
- Early 3rd PP: I am right [or we are right] but I can be expected to explain or justify myself by presenting information and logical reasons. Also, I can continue to learn to perfect my knowledge.
- Later 3rd PP: There is a right answer out there somewhere, and the goal is to use observation and reason to find it. I think I am right but it is possible that I will change if your argument is good enough.
- Early 4th PP: I think I am right but I realize that my belief, that all belief, is based on imperfect information and reasoning. I look forward to engaging with others with different perspectives in a process that will satisfy all of our needs as much as is possible.
- Later 4th PP: Knowledge and beliefs are complex, multi-layered phenomena, and diverse perspectives co-exist and co-create each other with dynamic systems of ideas. This is true not only

> for social dialogues and "knowledge building communities," but within each person there is a cacophony of voices and perspectives vying for dominance, and possibly open to integration.

The STAGES Model. Because we refer to O'Fallon's STAGES model a number of times in this text, we include a figure here, to clarify how the person-perspectives alternate between individual and collective modes, and the movement of passive to active modalities within a given level. For more info see O'Fallon (2011, 2013) and Murray (2017).